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FROM THE EDGE TO THE HEART OF THE CONGREGATION:
REACHING YOUNG MEN IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
IRELAND

By

ROBERT KANE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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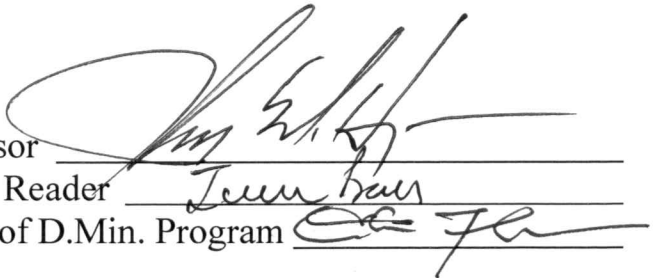IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover how congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have helped men, who are in the age-group eighteen to thirty-five, and are on the periphery of congregational life, to become actively involved in the spiritual life of their local Church. Through qualitative research methods, six successful churches were analyzed. The successful strategies discovered included a commitment to building relationships with young men, often through sports and recreational activities, the development of various types of men-only study groups and adjustments to the style of worship and preaching.

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I would like to thank my wife, Anne, for her constant support during the time that I spent away from home attending doctorate of ministry courses, conducting interviews for this study and writing this dissertation. Her love and support allowed me to complete this study and encourages me daily in life and ministry. I also give thanks for my children, Andrew, Jonathan and Deborah, for the delight that they bring me as their father.

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Of course, I am also greatly indebted to the faculty and staff at Covenant Seminary. I would like to thank Dr. Tasha Chapman for her substantial help in getting started, Dr. Mike Higgins for his support as my Faculty Advisor, Prof. Jerram Barrs for his encouragement during the defense, Rev. James Pakala for guidance in editing the references and especially Kristen Sagar for her generous help with editing and in many other ways.

Most of all, I thank God for allowing me to serve him as a minister and pray that more and more young men will be drawn to faith in Jesus Christ and active involvement in his Church.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ian and Jan regularly attend church with their two children Stephen, who is nine, and Caroline, who is six. However, Ian often finds a reason for not being able to attend. When both parents do attend church, while Jan sings enthusiastically, Ian barely sings at all, like most of the men around him. Jan teaches in Sunday school before the service; she loves to get to one of the midweek fellowship groups and enjoys the monthly women's group. Ian's involvement is mostly limited to his church attendance.

Peter and Patricia have recently been blessed by the birth of a baby daughter. When the minister visited to talk about baptism, they decided that Patricia would profess her faith and take the vows, but Peter would not.

Stephanie comes to church very regularly and is very involved in everything that is going on; she always brought the children with her when they were young, but finds them more and more resistant now that they are teenagers. There was a time when her husband David came with her, but he only came to please Stephanie, and now he doesn't attend at all.

Ian and Jan, Peter and Patricia, Stephanie and David, are not real people, but they are typical of many real people in congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI). Indeed, in this denomination and most other denominations in Ireland and beyond, fewer men typically attend church than women. Those men who do attend do so less often and are much less likely to be actively involved in the spiritual life of the

congregation. There are nearly always more woman than men at prayer meetings, Bible studies, or fellowship groups. This surely is a tragedy, not only for each individual man who is not being engaged, but also for the church itself, which needs the contribution that adult men can make. The tragedy is compounded in terms of young adult men, since young adults of both sexes are often the most under-represented age-group in congregational life.

But what is the reason for this lack of engagement among men? Is it because the gospel of Jesus Christ is more relevant to the needs or personalities of women? Or because women and just inherently more religious? Christian theology would strongly reject any such suggestion, but would rather maintain that the gospel message meets the deepest and most profound needs of every human, male or female. This being the case, the only alternative must surely be that the problem lies in the culture of the churches and the way the gospel message is communicated and modeled. In his book *Why Men Hate Going to Church*,[1] David Murrow is typical of many modern popular writers, suggesting that there must be something wrong with the church "system" today in different countries and across denominations. He quotes the well-known aphorism, "Your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you're getting."[2]

But what is the issue? The answers suggested by a number of these authors can be summed up in characteristically provocative form by Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, when he says, "Churches are constructed to attract women, children and effeminate men."[3]

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[1] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books 2005), vii.
[2] Murrow attributes the quotation to business consultant W. Edwards Deming.
[3] The Mandate, A Conference for Men at the Waterfront Hall, Belfast; 13th November 2010 (recordings available from www.themandate.net).

Is this correct? And if so, how can churches adjust the way they do things to address this vitally important issue? It is with these concerns in mind that the present research was carried out in the particular context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The researcher explored the question, "What is it that may be preventing men, and especially young men in the age-group eighteen to thirty, from active involvement in church life, and what positive steps can be taken to engage them?"

Statement of Problem

The Absence of Young Men

In 2007, Tearfund conducted a survey[4] covering the whole of the United Kingdom. The results revealed that the profile of regular churchgoers (attending at least once per month) was thirty-five percent men to sixty-five percent women. (This statistic is compared to the population profile of forty-eight percent men, fifty-two percent women). This imbalance between men and women is confirmed for English churches by Escott and Gelder[5] using data from the 2001 Congregational Life Survey, which also found that regular churchgoers were thirty-five percent men and sixty-five percent women.

Data from the U.S. Congregations website[6] (based on the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey), suggests that the gender profile of those attending church regularly in the United States is similar to that in the United Kingdom. This website also

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[4]Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, *Churchgoing in the UK; A research report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK* (Teddington, Middlesex: Tearfund, 2007).
[5]Phillip Escott and Alison Gelder, *Four Generations of English Churches* (Louisville, KY: U.S. Congregations, 2003), www.uscongregations.org/pdf/sisr-phillip.pdf, (14 April 2013).
[6] U.S. Congregations, *What Are the Major Challenges That U.S. Congregations Face?* www.uscongregations.org/challenges.htm, (12 April 2013).

breaks the figures down by generational units and finds the following profiles for

different generations:

	Gen X	Boomers	Builders	Seniors	Total
Born	1965-83	1945-64	1927-46	Before 1927	
	%	%	%	%	%
Female	62	64	65	71	65
Male	38	36	35	29	35
Total	100	100	100	100	100

While these figures suggest that the gender imbalance is less for younger

generations, they give no cause for complacency since the difference is only slight. These

statistics become even more concerning when viewed alongside figures for the age

profile of those who attend church. The Tearfund study also found that in the United

Kingdom, those aged between sixteen and thirty-four comprise thirty percent of the

population, but only make up only twenty percent of those who attend church, and those

over sixty-five, who make up only eighteen percent of the population, constitute thirty

percent of those who attend church regularly. Therefore, since men in general are

significantly underrepresented in church in comparison with women, and younger adults

are underrepresented in comparison with older people, it becomes clear that younger men

are the most underrepresented group.

While no gender or age-profile data is available from the Presbyterian Church in

Ireland (PCI) and little for Northern Ireland generally, two sets of data are available.

Firstly, the Tearfund study mentioned above found that regular church attendance in

Northern Ireland is three times higher than the United Kingdom average, that is forty-five

percent in Northern Ireland compared to fifteen percent in the United Kingdom.

(Estimates for United States church attendance vary from eighteen percent to forty-five

percent). Secondly, a survey carried out in 1993 by the *Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey*[7] yielded the following gender balances, across all Christian denominations, for those who attend church with various levels of frequency:

	Northern Ireland		Britain	
	Men *%*	Women *%*	Men *%*	Women *%*
Frequent	39	61	37	63
Regular	57	43	35	65
Rare	49	51	48	52

These figures suggest a rather specific pattern of church attendance in Northern Ireland compared to the United Kingdom generally. Firstly, the gender balance for those who describe their attendance as "frequent" is similar to the overall United Kingdom figure (thirty-nine percent to sixty-nine percent). However, among those who describe their attendance as regular, rather than frequent, the ratio is reversed, that is fifty-seven percent men to forty-three percent women. Therefore, when these two figures for frequent and regular church attendance are aggregated, the gender profile is seen to be forty-eight percent men to fifty-two percent women - close to the gender profile in the population.

While these Northern Ireland figures suggest the need for more detailed statistical research, they suggest the following reflections. Firstly, they show the effect of a more religiously conservative culture in Northern Ireland, where men are just as likely as women to consider themselves as church-goers. (It should be noted that the data in this survey is for how people describe their church attendance, rather than actual figures of

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[7] A.M. Gallagher, "Community Relations," in *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland: The Third Report*, ed. Peter Stringer and Gillian Robinson (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993).

attendance.) But, secondly they suggest an underlying problem in that those men who describe themselves as church-attenders are much more likely to identify their attendance as regular, rather than frequent. This may confirm the perception that the men who attend church are much less likely to show evidence of a lively faith and active discipleship.

This leads to the subject of gender imbalance in terms of active participation in the Christian faith, as opposed to mere attendance at worship. This issue is highlighted in data from *The Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,*[8] conducted by The Pew Forum on Public Life. These show that men of any religious affiliation in the United States are less likely to pray daily (forty-nine percent of men, sixty-six percent of women), say that religion is very important in their lives (forty-nine percent of men, sixty-three percent of women), or have absolute certain belief in a personal God (forty-five percent of men, fifty-eight percent of women).

Again, this characteristic of religious life seems to reflect a wider trend in society to view religion, and specifically Christianity, as more of a female than a male interest. Anecdotally, those involved in door-to-door witnessing in Northern Ireland report that it is quite typical for a man answering the door to respond, "Oh, you're from the church, I'll go and get the wife."

<u>The Importance of Young Men</u>

While the absence of young men in spirit, if not in body, from the life of Northern Ireland churches is clearly a cause of great concern, specifically regarding the spiritual condition of these men, it assumes a much greater importance when the profound influence these men could have is taken into account. The importance that the Bible

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[8] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "The Stronger Sex -- Spiritually Speaking," *U.S. Religions Landscape Survey*, 26 February 2009, http://pewforum.org/The-Stronger-Sex----Spiritually-Speaking.aspx. (14 April 2013).

attaches to the leadership role of men in the church and in the family,[9] is supported by a rather striking study conducted by the Swiss government,[10] which shows the profoundly influential role fathers have in the spiritual lives of their children. The study investigated how patterns in the church attendance of parents correlates with the eventual adult patterns of church attendance of their children. The results given below in Tables 3 and 4 show that where both father and mother attend church regularly, there is a one in three chance that their children will attend regularly; however, if the father does not attend regularly, this proportion is reduced to one in thirty-three. Conversely, if the father attends regularly and the mother does not, the chances of the children attending regularly actually increase to nearly one in two! (This increase is balanced by a higher proportion of children attending irregularly as opposed to not at all.)

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[9]1Timothy 2:12; 1 Cor. 11:3.

[10] Verner Haug, Paul Compton and Youssef Courbage, eds., *The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States, Volume 2* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe), 2000.

Mother attends Regularly		Father's Church Attendance		
		Regular	Irregular	Not at all
Child's Church Attendance in Adulthood	Regular	33%	3%	2%
	Irregular	41%	59%	37%
	Not at all	25%	38%	60%

Father Attends Regularly		Mother's Church Attendance		
		Regular	Irregular	Not at all
Child's Church Attendance in Adulthood	Regular	33%	38%	44%
	Irregular	41%	37%	22%
	Not at all	25%	26%	34%

Caution about these figures may, however, be indicated by a study that Smith and Snell conducted,[11] which found that when "emerging adults" aged eighteen to twenty-three were asked how similar their religious beliefs are to their mother's or father's beliefs, sixty-six percent said their beliefs were similar to their mothers, while sixty-four percent said their beliefs were similar to their fathers. Further research is clearly necessary.

Research has, however, consistently shown that fathers have a strong positive influence on a range of other developmental outcomes in their children. A review article

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[11] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford, 2009),128. Breaking these figures down further, among those identifying themselves as conservative Protestants, these figures were 74% similar to their mothers and 72% similar to their fathers, but mainline Protestants and black Protestants reported equal influence from both parents with figures of 61% and 76% respectively.

by Sarkadi et al.[12] has found evidence that the engagement of fathers leads to reduced behavioral problems, including delinquency and criminality; higher IQ scores and educational attainment in sons; and a lower risk of adult psychological morbidity in daughters.

Of course, not all young men become fathers, but most do. Since the young men who are missing from active involvement in contemporary congregations already have a profound influence on their families and could potentially have a powerful influence for good, both in their families and in the lives of congregations, drawing more of these men to active discipleship and service is surely a matter of vital importance to the health of churches.

This study considered what may be preventing so many young men from active involvement in church life and Christian discipleship, and what positive steps can be taken to engage them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to discover how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have helped men in the age-group eighteen to thirty-five, who are on the periphery of congregational life, to become actively involved in the spiritual lives of their local churches.

Research Questions

The study focused on three main areas: the issues that hinder young men from active involvement in the church, the factors that draw them towards deeper commitment, and the strategies that churches have used to engage them. The researcher sought to

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[12] Anna Sarkadi, Robert Kristiansson, Frank Oberklaid, and Sven Bremberg, "Fathers' Involvement and Children's Developmental Outcomes: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies," *Acta Paediatrica* 97, no. 2 (February 2008): 153-158.

isolate factors that are particularly relevant to men in the young-adult stage of life, as well as things a church can do to draw men to faith and discipleship.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What issues tend to prevent men, ages 18-30, from active spiritual involvement in the church?

   a. As men?

   b. At this stage in life?

   c. In church culture?

2. What aspects of church life tend to attract these men to active spiritual involvement in the church?

   a. as men?

   b. at this stage in life?

   c. in church culture?

3. What strategies have been effective for engaging young men in active discipleship?

Significance of the Study

This study has great significance, first of all for the lives of churches and for the young adult men who at present are disengaged from those churches. But the study is also significant for the families of these men and for the wider society, because of the benefit that would come from the commitment of the young men to active Christian discipleship.

To bring into the centre of the church's life those men who at present remain on the periphery, and to engage these men in more active discipleship, would have a profoundly beneficial effect on these men. For them to actively engage with God's word,

the Bible in a relevant way, to engage with God in prayer, and to share their lives with others in Christian fellowship would draw them to a more lively faith and would enable them to grow towards a stronger faith. This would help them to live out their faith more effectively, enjoying greater joy and satisfaction in God and showing more Christ-like character in their behavior.

In turn, this would better enable these men to be spiritual leaders in their homes, godly husbands and fathers, and strong role-models for their children, especially their sons. It would enable them to be more effective witnesses to those with whom they interact in their work, as well as among their wider families, friends, and neighbors. In particular, these men would naturally be able to reach out effectively with the gospel to other men, who are as yet outside the church.

What a difference it would make to have more spiritually mature men in the youth ministry of the congregation, in its prayer ministry, leading in fellowship groups, reinforcing the teaching ministry, in outreach initiatives and especially as elders of the congregation!

Definition of Terms

Discipleship

According to biblical teaching, being a Christian means more than assenting to certain beliefs about God, more than adhering to a particular moral code, and more than participating in certain rituals of worship. Rather, in the teaching of Jesus, as in all scriptural teaching, Christian faith is fundamentally a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, which involves re-orienting one's whole life with God at the centre. This Christ-centred life manifests itself in personal devotion to Christ through regular

private worship, as well as regular corporate worship, specific times of prayer, and Bible study. Christian discipleship also involves bearing witness to Christ among those outside the church, both by verbal and non-verbal communication of the gospel in daily life.

Spiritual Involvement

In the context of this study, "spiritual involvement" refers to one's involvement in the more specifically spiritual activities of the church, such as worship, corporate prayer, Bible study groups and evangelism.

The Northern Ireland "Troubles"

The Troubles is the most common term for the very serious community conflict that afflicted Northern Ireland, beginning in the mid-1960s and beginning to subside with the signing of the "Good Friday Agreement" or "Belfast Agreement" of 1998. The key issue at stake was the constitutional status of the six counties that comprise Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. The majority, mainly Protestant unionist or loyalist community wishing to maintain the link with Britain and the largely Catholic Nationalist or Republican community favoring an independent 32 county united Ireland. The conflict was characterized by armed campaigns of republican and loyalist paramilitary groups. These included the republican Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and various loyalist groups including the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). The state security forces – the British Army and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) - while seeking to maintain law and order, were often the targets of IRA violence. During these years over eighteen hundred civilians, one thousand security force personnel, nearly four hundred republican paramilitaries and over one hundred and fifty loyalist paramilitaries lost their lives.

A regrettable feature of the conflict was a polarization of society, with the cities and large towns being divided into Protestant or Catholic areas, with territory often marked by flags, graffiti, etc. Within working-class areas, especially, the various paramilitary organizations exercised (and to some extent continue to exercise) considerable power and were often involved in various types of criminal activity including drug trafficking.

Unchurched

In this study, "unchurched" refers to people who do not attend church and have no meaningful connection to any local church.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to consider how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have helped men in the age-group eighteen to thirty, who are on the periphery of congregational life, to become actively involved in the spiritual lives of their local churches. In order to understand the issues relevant to men of this age in relation to church involvement, four areas of literature were reviewed. First, relevant secular academic literature was reviewed within the broad area of "masculinity." This literature considers the psychological and social characteristics of men and the relations between the sexes in society. Second, the subject of masculinity and the role of men within both the church and wider society was reviewed within Christian biblical theology, beginning with the doctrine of creation and following though biblical history to the present day. Third, literature dealing with the particular characteristics of young men was explored, taking into account recent cultural developments in western society and research into the religious life of this generation. Finally, the recent trends in popular Christian writing on the subject of masculinity and the needs of men in church life were surveyed.

Masculinity

In order to discuss the psychological and social characteristics of men, and how these are distinguished in today's British and Western context, it will be necessary to consider such questions as whether or not there is one definitive set of "masculine" characteristics across cultures, as well as the origin of the ideas and experiences of

masculinity and femininity. Is masculinity something inherent in the genetic make-up of men, or is it learned in the social environment? These issues have been the focus of much discussion in recent years, both in the academic fields of psychology and sociology and in popular Christian publishing. There is also a biblical, theological perspective on this issue.

Secular Academic Research

At least two strands of study and research in this area can be discerned from the literature. Generally, within the social sciences, the subject of "men's studies" has risen to prominence, mostly since the 1980s and mainly in the context of more general gender studies, stimulated by the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s. In the social sciences, at least, gender roles tend to be regarded as socially constructed, rather than as determined by biology.[13] The recent dominant perspective, therefore, is that there is not just one, but many masculinities. In the words of one recent researcher,

> Within current perspectives on masculinity, researchers have abandoned the view of a single standard of manhood (typically white, heterosexual and middle-class) and now position the existence of "multiple masculinities." Drawing on social constructionism, this perspective argues that masculinity is neither immutable nor monolithic; rather, it exists in diverse forms that change as a function of cultural and historical factors. [14]

One important concept in this literature is the idea of "hegemonic masculinity." In his important book *Masculinities*, R.W. Connell explains hegemonic masculinity in this way: "Hegemony refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than

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[13] C. Jay Wade, "Male Reference Group Identity Dependence: A Theory of Male Identity," *Counselling Psychologist* 26, no. 3 (1998): 349.

[14] Cathal A. B. Johnston and Todd G. Morrison, "The Presentation of Masculinity in Everyday Life: Contextual Variations in the Masculine Behaviour of Young Irish Men," *Sex Roles* 57, no. 9-10 (2007).

others is culturally exalted."[15] In any society, therefore, there tends to be one understanding of masculinity that predominates and to which men in that society feel obliged to conform. This hegemonic masculinity defines what "real men" or "authentic men" are like in that society; hence such ideas as "real men don't cry" or "an authentic man will always rise to a challenge."

In the 1970s, David and Brannon[16] identified four norms of traditional masculinity: "no sissy stuff" (the stigma of anything feminine); "the big wheel" (success, status, and the need to be revered); "the sturdy oak" (a manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance); and "give 'em hell" (the aura of aggression, violence, and daring). Since then, various inventories of male characteristics have been developed, culminating in various forms of the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI), which measures seven norms of traditional masculine ideology: avoidance of femininity, fear and hatred of homosexuals, self-reliance, toughness and aggression, achievement/status, non-relational attitudes toward sex, and restrictive emotionality.[17,18] Clearly these two lists are very similar, with the exception of the addition in the MRNI of the negative attribute of restrictive emotionality. The focus of sociological research has often been on the limitations placed on men's lives, resulting from societal pressures to confirm to stereotypes.

A second strand of research, which tends to challenge the constructionist view, has involved psychologists in the detailed study of the actual differences between men

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[15] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 77.

[16] Deborah S. David and Robert Brannon, *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley), 1976.

[17] Ronald F. Levant and Katherine Richmond, "A Review of Research on Masculinity Ideologies Using the Male Role Norms Inventory," *Journal of Men's Studies* 15, no. 2 (2007).

[18] F. Levant Ronald et al., "Initial Validation of the Male Role Norms Inventory-Revised (Mrni-R)," *Journal of Men's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2007).

and women in terms of personality traits, which involves how men and women score in the "five-factor model of personality." This model structures personality traits in terms of five broad factors, with several sub-factors within each.

Research of this kind has shown a consistent pattern of gender differences across cultures, with men scoring higher in assertiveness and excitement-seeking within the extraversion (E) factor and openness to ideas. Men also generally score higher, although to a lesser extent, in the conscientiousness (C) factor, especially competence and deliberation.[19, 20, 21] On the other hand, women score higher (and, therefore, men lower) in the neuroticism (N) and agreeableness (A) factors, along with the warmth and gregarious sub-factors of extraversion (E) and openness to aesthetics and feelings. However, these studies show that in addition to there being significant differences in personality traits, there is also considerable variation within each sex. The fact that these traits are constant across cultures suggests that they may be due to genetic factors, rather than merely conditioned by environment.

These traits also show a fair degree of common ground with the MRNI data above. For instance, the personality trait of assertiveness perhaps correlates with the traditional male assumptions of toughness and aggression, with a high value put on status. The excitement-seeking trait correlates with daring. And the competence and deliberation traits correlate with a high value placed on achievement and success. Again, the low scoring for the personality traits of openness to aesthetics and feelings, warmth,

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[19] T. Paul Costa, Jr., Antonio Terracciano, and Robert R. McCrae, "Gender Differences in Personality Traits across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 2 (2001).

[20] David P. Schmitt, Anu Realo, Martin Voracek, and Juri Allik, "Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman. Sex Differences in Big Five Personality Traits across 55 Cultures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no. 1 (2008).

[21] Joy Rebecca White, *Sex Differences in Personality in the United States and the Philippines: An Investigation of Cross-Cultural Universality* (Ph D. Thesis, Washington State University, 2002).

gregariousness, and agreeableness may correlate with the restrictive emotionality of the traditional male image.

In order to further investigate the origins of the differences between men and women in terms of the relative influence of genetic and environmental factors, research has been carried out for people in different cultural contexts and at different ages using twin studies[22, 23] as well as MRI brain imaging.[24] The results of this research have consistently shown that the personality differences between the sexes are influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, with the genetic component accounting for up to half of those personality differences.[25] [26]

Biblical/Theological Framework

The Bible has authority for Christians and Christian churches, not only to guide the organization of religious and church life, but to inform humanity of who they are as people, male and female, and how they should relate to one another. In order to address the particular focus of this research, it will be necessary to consider in detail the Bible's teaching on the nature of men as created by God and the instructions God gives about the role men are to play and how they are to relate to women. This information will shed light on how the specific needs of men can be addressed in church life today. Account

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[22] Richard Lippa and Scott Hershberger, "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Individual Differences in Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Diagnosticity: Analyzing Data from a Classic Twin Study," *Journal of Personality* 67, no. 1 (1999): 127-55.

[23] John C. Loehlin et al., "Psychological Masculinity-Femininity Via the Gender Diagnosticity Approach: Heritability and Consistency across Ages and Populations," *Journal of Personality* 73, no. 5 (2005): 1295.

[24] Jessica L. Wood, Vesna Murko, and Peg Nopoulos, "Ventral Frontal Cortex in Children: Morphology, Social Cognition and Femininity/Masculinity," *SCAN (Social, Cogitive and Affective Neuroscience)*, no. 3 (2008): 168-76.

[25] Jane E. Mitchell, Laura A. Baker, and Carol N. Jacklin, "Masculinity and Femininity in Twin Children: Genetic and Environmental Factors," *Child Development* 60, no. 6 (1989).

[26] R. Lippa, "Sex Differences in Personality Traits and Gender-Related Occupational Preferences across 53 Nations: Testing Evolutionary and Social-Environmental Theories," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2010): 619.

will also need to be taken of the biblical doctrine of the fall of human-kind and the effect of human sin on the relationships between men and women in society.

This section will begin by considering the nature of biblical authority for the Christian and how texts should be interpreted within their original historical context. Then, the teaching of the Bible with respect to masculinity will be considered as it rises in the creation accounts in Genesis and throughout the unfolding plan of biblical history, noting both the gender-distinctive roles played by men and the gender-specific instructions that are given. Throughout this discussion, wider cultural assumptions will be taken into account.

<div align="center">The Nature of Biblical Authority</div>

One of the fundamental assumptions made by Evangelical Christians[27] is that the Bible is not merely one ancient text among many, but is actually inspired by God; it is God's word to human-kind.[28] If it is assumed, therefore, as is suggested by the literature, that the characteristics that men exhibit in society are caused by a combination of genetic factors and social conditioning, and if the Bible is indeed God's word to human-kind, then one can expect that the Bible will shed light on the inherent genetic nature of the people God made.

However, the Bible is also a human book, in that it is a collection of documents written over a period of some two thousand years, by more than fifty authors. Evangelical Christians believe that while God the Holy Spirit inspired each of these authors so that what they wrote is God's word, the documents they created were mediated through the personality of each author and were originally written in a particular historical context

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[27] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 97-99.
[28] 2 Timothy 3:16.

and a particular cultural setting. While particular texts have universal application as the word of God, each text must first be understood in the context in which it was written before being applied more widely.

Any discussion of masculinity and of the role of men in scripture must therefore take account of the fact that, while the cultural context in which the different books of the Bible were written varies enormously, one constant cultural assumption in every context is the patriarchal role of men in society. In interpreting any text that relates to the respective roles of men and women, and applying that text to a twenty-first century Western cultural context, the question always arises as to whether the instruction given is prescriptive, applying to all contexts, or whether it is to be interpreted as accommodating the cultural assumptions of the time.

This principle can be illustrated with analogy to the subject of slavery, which in various forms is assumed as a feature of society throughout scripture. Slavery is never endorsed as such, but is regulated in the Law of Moses. In passages such as Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 2, instructions are given to Christian slaves and their masters. In the modern context, however, Christians universally regard slavery as wrong and indeed a sinful practice. With this principle of interpretation in mind, the researcher will consider the distinct gender role of men in the Bible.

<div align="center">The Person of God</div>

Throughout the Bible, God is always referenced by using the male personal pronoun "he." However, in contrast to other ancient religions, the God of the Bible has no female counterpart and is generally not mentioned in sexual terms. Yet, the pictorial language that is used to depict God's person and actions, and his relationship with his

people, tends utilize terms of traditionally male roles: God is a king, a warrior, a husband to his people, a shepherd of his flock, a judge, and a lawgiver. Only occasionally is God discussed in terms of female imagery; for example Jesus likens himself to a mother hen caring for her chicks in Matthew 23:37.

<div align="center">Creation Patterns</div>

In his analysis of the creation accounts in the first two chapters of Genesis, Daniel Block, a professor of Old Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has demonstrated that the relationship between the first man and woman as described in these chapters can be summarized as one of ontological equality and functional complementarity.[29] He highlights several points in this discussion. First, in terms of ontological unity, Block notes first that both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God.[30] Second, God addresses both Adam and Eve with the command to fill and govern the earth.[31] Third, in creating Eve, God specifically describes her not as a servant or slave to Adam, but as a helper to complement him. Fourth, the fact that God created the woman from the rib of the man,[32] rather than from his feet or head, suggests that she is to be his equal, at his side. Fifth, in Genesis 2:23, the man recognizes her as his female counterpart. And sixth, Genesis 2:24-25 highlights the mutuality of the one-flesh relationship of marriage.

Alongside this ontological unity, albeit with a complementarity of roles, Block points out what he calls "clear signals of a functional ordering."[33] These include, first, the

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[29] Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 65.
[30] Genesis 1:26.
[31] Genesis 1:28.
[32] Genesis 2:22.
[33] Block, 66.

order of their creation—the man, then the woman; second, the creation of woman

specifically to meet the man's need for company; third, the woman's being created from

man, not the other way around; fourth, God's presentation of the woman to the man, not

the man to the woman; fifth, the text's androcentric focus, quoting the man's response to

the woman and not her response to him; and sixth, the man's naming the woman with a

name derived from his.

     In addition, God gives specifically to the man the instructions for life in the

garden.[34] Later, when the man and woman hide from God in Genesis 3:9, God

specifically addresses the man, though he is speaking to them both. These two instances

of God communicating to the couple through the man imply the man's leadership role.

Leadership here implies the authority of the man over the woman, along with a

corresponding responsibility for her. Block summarizes the creation ideal, explaining,

"In their status and dignity before one another and before God, husband and wife are

fundamentally and ontologically equal, and in their masculinity and femininity they fulfill

complementary roles. However, the focus on the man in Genesis 2 anticipates what

follows namely the male headship of the family unit."[35]

<div align="center">General Old Testament Patterns</div>

     As the biblical narrative continues, the entrance of sin into the human experience

in Genesis 3 causes the creation ideal to be twisted and spoiled, as complementary roles

become competitive and male leadership often becomes abusive domination. The curse of

God upon the woman summarizes, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will

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[34] Genesis 2:16.
[35] Block, 66.

rule over you."[36] Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, a pattern of male patriarchy is assumed. All the main characters in the story are male, beginning with Cain and Abel; and when God calls or instructs individuals, those individuals are invariably male, for example, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron.

In the organization of the nation of Israel, men also predominate in both civil and religious leadership. The male descendants of Aaron comprise the priesthood, and the male members of the tribe of Levi are set aside for the service of the Tabernacle and Temple. One of the functions of both priests and Levites was the instruction of the people in the Law of God.[37] Again, within the nation of Israel, the duty of parents to instruct their children, in both the Law of God and the rich history of God's dealings with his people, was of great importance.[38] Within the home, this duty was primarily the responsibility of the head of the home, who was the father.[39]

Again, with a few notable exceptions, most prophets, who bring God's word to humankind, are men, and all the political leaders appointed by God, whether tribal elders, judges, or monarchs, are all men. The only exception to this is Deborah, In her case there is at least the suggestion[40] that her appointment by God is connected to the lack of appropriate male leadership at that time, reflecting the sorry spiritual state of the nation. It may also be significant that the sign of the covenant people of God is the sign of male circumcision. Another role that is obviously viewed as reserved for men is that of fighting and going to war. Soldiers are exclusively male, and even in Deborah's case,

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[36] Genesis 3:16.
[37] E.g. Nehemiah 8:7-9.
[38] Deuteronomy 6:1-9
[39] Psalm 78:1-8, esp. vv. 3, 5.
[40] Judges 4:9 (Note also the role of Jael in 4:17-22).

there was never any question of her leading the army into battle, a responsibility she delegated in God's name to a man named Barak.[41]

Within the stipulations of the Law of Moses, the system of male patriarchy is assumed but regulated, mainly to protect women. For example, in Exodus 21, a female Hebrew slave who is acquired as a concubine cannot be sold, but must be provided with food, clothing and marital rights, should her master marry another woman. Later, the discussion of vows in Numbers 30 assumes that fathers are responsible for the actions of their daughters until the daughters are married, at which time their husbands take on that responsibility.

However, this pattern of male patri-centricity (and often sinful male domination) does not mean that the creation ideals of equality and complementarity are lost. While most prophets were men, some were women, notably the prophetess Hulda in 2 Kings 2:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22. Block[42] finds numerous affirmations of the dignity of the wife and opportunities for her to exercise leadership, especially in family life. The wife of noble character, so respectfully described in Proverbs 31, highlights her initiative, creativity and energy; she is obviously subordinate to her husband, but by no means subservient.

Block also points out[43] that women as well as men were invited to appear before Yahweh at the authorized place of worship when the people took possession of the Promised Land[44] and gathered with the men and children old enough to understand, when

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[41] Judges 4:6 (however, again note the role of Jael in 4:21).
[42] Block, 66.
[43] Ibid., 69.
[44] In Deuteronomy 12:12.

the Torah was read in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem.[45] Unlike Herod's temple (still being

built during the life of Jesus), which had separate courts for women and Gentiles, no

previous structures for worship (including the tabernacle, Solomon's temple and the

temple envisioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel) excluded women or even segregated them

from men. Block suggests that the common opinion that women in ancient Israel had no

legal status but were regarded as the property first of their father and then of their

husband is "simplistic and erroneous."[46] While the relationship to fathers and husbands

was clearly one of submission to authority, that authority was not oppressive. Rather, it

provided necessary security both economically and physically.

Even bearing in mind the possibility that scriptural patterns are accommodated to

the cultural context of the time, this accumulated evidence, and especially the creation

patterns of Genesis 1-3, does seem to indicate that male leadership is, in general at least,

a God-ordained pattern for the relationship between the sexes and for the ordering of

society. Within the household, the wider family, the tribe, and the nation, in both civil

and religious life, it is men who have the authority under God to lead, to judge, to teach,

and to represent the wider group. But along with this authority comes a responsibility

before God to exercise that God-give authority in a responsible way, to respect, provide

for, and protect those under male authority, especially the weak and vulnerable. This

includes a willingness to fight in battle to protect the community from its enemies.

<div align="center">The Ministry of Jesus</div>

By the time of Jesus, it would seem that the position of women in Jewish society

had deteriorated significantly, not only from the creation pattern, but from Old Testament

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[45] As recorded in Nehemiah 8.
[46] Ibid., 69.

norms. Evidence[47] of this is found in the writings of several contemporary authors,

including Josephus, who refers to the Jewish law as teaching that wives are inferior to

men in all things. Further, various texts found at Qumran highlight the domination of

husbands over their wives. Another example is the famous statement by Rabbi Judah ben

Elai, who noted, "There are three Benedictions which one must say every day: 'Blessed

be He who did not make me a Gentile;' 'Blessed be He who did not make me a woman;'

'Blessed be He who did not make me an uneducated man.'"[48] While this quotation is

dated to the second century AD, it likely echoes statements made earlier. It is also

interesting to note that for a meeting to take place in a synagogue, ten men needed to be

present. Women were classed with slaves and minors and could not be included to make

up the ten.[49] Summarizing this and other evidence from the Talmud, James B. Hurley[50]

states: "Women were generally assumed by the rabbis to be persons incapable of learning

about religious things." This often resulted in the exclusion of women from religious

study, from learning or teaching the law, and from active participation in worship.

Even stronger statements about the inferiority of women are found in the inter-

testamental book of Ben Sirach, with one of the more extreme examples being Ben

Sirach 42: 13-14, which states:

> for out of clothes comes the moth,
> > and out of woman comes woman's wickedness.
> Better a man's wickedness than a woman's goodness;
> > it is woman who brings shame and disgrace.[51]

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[47] David W. Chapman, "Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 206f.
[48] Ibid., 208.
[49] Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth, vii, 2.
[50] James B Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective; a Study in Role Relationships and Authority* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 63.
[51] Revised English Bible.

On the other hand, David W. Chapman[52] finds evidence of a more positive attitude about women in all these sources, including the accounts of women who exercised considerable power, and the accounts of men expressing deep appreciation for the blessings of a good wife, even in Ben Sira.[53]

It is against this background that Kenneth E. Bailey, who spend forty years living and teaching New Testament in the Middle East, examines the attitude of Jesus toward women as seen in the gospel records.[54] He finds Jesus' attitude to be in stark contrast to the prevailing attitudes of his day. Bailey first[55] points out that Jesus had female disciples. He refers to the following four texts: the feminine form of the word "disciple" with reference to Tabitha,[56] Jesus' reference to his disciples as his "mother, sister and brother",[57] Jesus' commendation of Mary the sister of Martha for taking the posture of a disciple in sitting at his feet to listen to his teaching,[58] and the fact recorded in Luke 8:1-3 that Jesus travelled from place to place, not only with his band of male disciples but with some women, three of whom are named, who gave financial support to the disciple band. Bailey describes this latter practice as astonishing, given the social customs of the times.

Bailey then goes on[59] to list a number of occasions when Jesus refers to two parallel stories or tells two parables, one involving a man and the other a woman, or when he uses two illustrations that appeal to both a male and a female audience. These include the references to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian in Luke 4:25-27, the

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[52] Chapman, 210.
[53] Sir. 36: 22-25.
[54] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 2008), 189-275.
[55] Ibid., 192.
[56] Acts 9:36.
[57] Matthew 12:48-50.
[58] Luke 10:38.
[59] Bailey, 194.

twin parables in Luke 5:36-39 of the mending of a garment (the work of a woman) and the making of wine (the work of a man), the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15, and the parables in Luke 13:18-21 of the mustard seed (farming is man's work) and kneading leaven into dough (women's work).

Bailey has further identified twenty-seven cases within Luke's gospel of the pairing of men and women, beginning with the stories of the angel appearing to Zechariah and then to Mary in Luke 1 and ending with the prominence of men as witnesses to the death and burial of Jesus in Luke 23 and the prominence of women as witnesses to his resurrection in Luke 24. Bailey also discusses in detail[60] several accounts in which Jesus breaks cultural traditions, not only by speaking to women, but by teaching them about significant doctrinal issues.[61] Bailey highlights examples in which Jesus makes a woman the hero of a story[62] or shows deep compassion for sinful women, in contrast to the attitudes of others in his culture, showing enormous courage in publicly expressing that compassion.[63]

While all this evidence clearly shows the deliberate intention of Jesus to "redress the balance" by countering the negative attitudes toward women that had developed in previous centuries and were evident in the society in which he lived, his teaching and practice in no way negated the creation pattern of Genesis 1 and 2 or the general teaching of the Old Testament scriptures. In other words, Jesus sought to recover the ontological equality of men and women, but did not say or do anything to contradict the functional complementarity discussed above. None of the evidence cited by Bailey suggests such a

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[60] Ibid., 200ff.
[61] The woman at the well in John 4 and the Syro-Pheonician woman in Matthew 15.
[62] The parable of the woman and the judge in Luke 18.
[63] The woman caught in adultery in John 8 and the woman in the house of Simon in Luke 7.

contradiction. Notably, Jesus did not include any women among his twelve apostles.

Indeed, the evidence of the practice and teaching of his apostles, as shown in the rest of

the New Testament scriptures, confirms the restoration in the early church of the creation

pattern: ontological equality and functional complementarity.

<div align="center">The Early Church</div>

In his book, *Men and Women in Biblical Perspective*,[64] James B. Hurley points

out[65] that, again in contrast to the Judaism of the day, women are always included in

accounts of the life of the early church. This is seen immediately among the 120 believers

who awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, and in the prayer, worship, and

lives of the churches as they developed. On the day of Pentecost, Peter explains that the

disciples' becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, evident in their sudden ability to speak

foreign languages, was as a fulfillment of the prophesy in Joel 2, in which the prophet

states: "Your sons and your daughters will prophesy ... and on my servants, both men and

women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.…"[66] In subsequent accounts, there are

female prophets,[67] women being taught the scriptures alongside men, and women hosting

churches[68] and giving private instruction.[69] Paul also refers to certain women[70] as his

fellow-workers to whom he owes a great debt.

As the more formal offices of elder/bishop and deacon emerged in the early

church, it at least seems to have been assumed that elders would be male.[71] However,

Hurley, for one, suggests that the role of deacon may have been open to both men and

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[64] Hurley, 115ff.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Joel 2: 28-29.
[67] Acts 21:9.
[68] Col. 4:15.
[69] Priscilla in Acts 18:24-28.
[70] Phoebe and others in Rom. 16.
[71] 1 Tim. 3: 1-7, Titus 1: 6-9.

women. He finds evidence for this in 1 Timothy 3, where alongside the list of

qualifications for the position of deacon, one reads in v. 11: "in the same way, the women

are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy

in everything."[72] These women may be the wives of deacons, an interpretation that is

evident in many translations, or they may themselves be deacons. However,

notwithstanding these exceptions, it was predominantly men who took a leading role in

every aspect of church life. The apostles were all men, those appointed in Acts 6 to care

for the widows were men, and the members of Paul's missionary band, who travelled

with him on his journeys,[73] were also exclusively male.

The researcher will now turn from the practice of the apostolic church to the

specific teaching of the apostles. First, of note is Paul's remarkable statement in Galatians

3:26-29:

> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who
> were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither
> Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are
> all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and
> heirs according to the promise.[74]

Of course, these verses appear in the context of a letter that is primarily concerned with

salvation, reinforcing the central gospel message that salvation is by God's grace, through

faith, and not by works of the law. Paul's primary point in these particular verses is

therefore that everyone is saved on the same basis – there is no distinction in terms of

racial or social background, or in terms of gender. All people, created in God's image, are

equal in dignity and worth. Every person has sinned and therefore deserves God's wrath,

and in Christ each person must repent of that sin and rebellion and trust in Christ

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[72] 1Tim. 3:11.
[73] E.g., Acts 20:4.
[74] Gal.3: 26-29.

personally. Given this context, therefore, verse twenty-eight does not imply that Paul

sought to abolish the distinctive and complementary roles of men and women established

at creation. Indeed, what Paul and others say throughout the rest of the New Testament

confirms the functional complementarity that is clear in both the creation accounts and

the Old Testament as a whole.

The New Testament's support of the Old Testament's complementary gender

roles is most obvious in the instructions that both Paul and Peter give for the distinctive

roles of husband and wife in marriage, for example, in Ephesians 5. Here, Paul parallels

the relationship between husband and wife with the relationship between Christ and the

church. While both husbands and wives have a responsibility to show love to one other,

and while Paul, in verse twenty-one, instructs all Christians to "submit to one another out

of reverence for Christ,"[75] Paul gives gender-specific instructions to both parties. He

specifically instructs wives to submit to and respect their husbands as the church does

Christ, and he specifically instructs husbands to love their wives, again as Christ has

loved the church.

This parallel between marriage and Christ's relationship with the church also

appears in the context of worship. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul develops the idea of

"headship." In verse three of that chapter, he says: "Now I want you to realize that the

head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is

God."[76] While the Greek word *kephale* can refer to the top or source of something, for

example, the source of a river, in Ephesians 5:23, it clearly refers to the authority of a

husband, to which his wife should submit.

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[75] Eph.5:21.
[76] 1Cor.11:3.

In the context of worship, Paul's most explicit reference to the practical relationship between men and women appears in 1 Timothy 2:

> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Here, the issue is a distinction in the roles of men and women, rather than in their inherent value. Paul appeals not to what is culturally acceptable in his day, but to the order of creation and to the events that led to the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. Hurley argues that the issues of authority and teaching are not separate issues in Paul's mind. Rather, the context suggests that he is thinking of the particular situation of teaching with authority. He concludes, "Paul intended that women should not be authoritative teachers in the church."[77]

As for the reference in verse fourteen to the woman being deceived, Hurley argues that Paul is not blaming the woman for the fall. Instead, he says that since she "was not the appointed religious leader," she was not prepared by God to discern the serpent's lies and, so, was deceived. Rather, it was Adam's role to show leadership, and he was therefore the one who bore the most responsibility. In the church, therefore, Paul wishes to re-establish the creation pattern of male leadership in teaching and in discerning error.[78]

One final rather difficult passage from Paul is found in 1 Corinthians 13:34-35, which states, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about

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[77] Hurley, 201.
[78] Ibid., 216.

something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."[79] Paul's instruction that "women should remain silent in the churches" seems at odds with his assumption in chapter eleven of the same letter that women will pray and indeed prophesy in the context of church worship. Hurley suggests that the context in chapter fourteen is the specific situation mentioned a few verses earlier, where prophecies uttered by various people during worship are being carefully "weighed" by the others. Paul would therefore assert that it is not the role of women to be involved in a task which clearly involves teaching authority.

The role of men in the church as practiced in the early church and taught by the New Testament scriptures is in accord with the patterns set at creation and evidenced in the rest of the biblical witness. In the family and in the church, God has given the responsibility of leadership primarily to men. This leadership has a particular goal of passing on the biblical gospel message from one generation to the next, one of the main priorities for the church in this era.[80] This male-specific leadership is, however, a servant leadership, as is evidenced by Jesus himself. Jesus instructed his disciples that they were not to exercise authority like those among the Gentiles who "lord it over" others, but, he exhorted them; "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."[81] Again, in marriage, men have a particular responsibility to love their wives as Christ loves the church, giving their lives for their wives.[82]

The Bible never specifically defines masculinity or femininity. Yet, it is clear from the above passages that, while men and women are created equal in bearing the

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[79] 1Cor.13:34-35.
[80] See also 2 Timothy 2: 2, "…the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will be qualified to teach others."
[81] Matthew 20:25ff, Mark 10:45, Luke 22:25.
[82] Ephesians 5:25ff.

image and likeness of God and have equal value and dignity, they are created to be different, not only physically, but also psychologically. Psychologically, men and women often exhibit distinct personality traits that are appropriate for their respective complementary roles. The ontological unity and functional complementarity established in the creation account are thus consistently assumed throughout scripture and have been worked out in innumerable cultures over the past three thousand years of biblical history. The biblical view of the creational difference between men and women is consistent with the results of the academic research of this study, which has found that the personality differences between men and women in all societies are caused by both genetic and cultural factors.

<p style="text-align:center">Masculine Metaphors</p>

Finally, in the context of research concerned with encouraging men to engage in more active involvement in the church, the researcher will conclude this survey of the Bible's teaching on masculinity and role of men by considering the very masculine metaphors that the Bible uses in its teaching on Christian discipleship. Throughout the Old Testament, the narrative of the Bible's story often includes stories of battles between God's people and their enemies, who are nearly always also God's enemies. In this context, the leaders of God's people, especially their kings, are often called to be warriors who lead the army into battle. Examples of this include Abram rescuing Lot from the army of the Five Kings in Genesis 14 and Moses holding up his staff as Joshua leads his people in battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17. Joshua himself leads the people in conquest of the Promised Land, and most of the judges were raised up by God to rescue the people from their enemies; all the kings thereafter led the army of God's

people into battle. Indeed, in many of these battles, the text is clear that God is fighting on behalf of his people.[83]

In the New Testament, these very real, often violent and bloody examples of physical warfare form the backdrop of the New Testament emphasis on spiritual war. Christians are portrayed as soldiers who need to be spiritually tough, wearing spiritual armor and competent in the use of the spiritual weapons such as the Bible and prayer.[84] This emphasis on the constant war between God and his enemies culminates in the picture in Revelation 19:11ff of the risen Christ pictured as a glorious warrior King on a white horse leading the armies of heaven. Other New Testament metaphors include that of the Christian as a hard-working farmer[85] and as an athlete who disciplines his body in order to compete in the race to receive the prize as hundreds of spectators look on all around the stadium.[86] Scripture supplies many examples of men who not only risked but lost their lives in the service of their master. Chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews gives many very graphic examples of both men and women who were tortured and killed, and those who achieved great feats through daring to believe.

Characteristics of Men Aged Eighteen to Thirty

Having considered the characteristics of men in general, the researcher will turn now to consider the distinctive characteristics of young men, ages eighteen to thirty. One of the most helpful ways to gain insight into the lives of today's young men is to consider recent developmental research on that specific stage of life for young adults of both sexes. In this section, the researcher will introduce the subject of human development,

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[83] Most notably in the Exodus from Egypt - see Exodus 15.
[84] Ephesians 6.
[85] 2 Timothy 2.
[86] Hebrews 12:1-2.

especially as it pertains to the young-adult age group, and will then survey the most recent research. This survey will introduce the subject of "emerging adulthood", both in general terms and with respect to the spiritual and religious lives of young adults. Although most of the literature on young adult development describes the development of both males and females, this discussion will highlight any areas in which the literature notes gender distinctions, especially as they relate to young men.

<div align="center">Human Development</div>

Throughout the twentieth century, researchers have provided valuable insights into the stages and processes of human development, especially those occurring between birth and adulthood. These scholars have examined several specific aspects of human development, such as psychological development, moral development, faith development, and psychosocial development. Of most interest, on the transition into adulthood, is the work of Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson. In the following pages, the researcher will review the contribution of these men and discuss in some depth the more recent phenomenon of "emerging adulthood."

Erikson and Levinson

During the first part of the twentieth century, Erik Erikson developed his theory of psychosocial development, identifying eight stages of human development from birth to late adulthood.[87] He described each stage as marked by a conflict between two opposite poles, one positive and the other negative, with a successful resolution of the conflict resulting in a favorable outcome. In terms of the transition from childhood through adolescence to mature adulthood, Erikson identified the following stages:

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[87] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1964).

Adolescence – Ages Twelve to Nineteen – Identity Versus Role Confusion

At this stage, individuals are attempting to discover their sense of self: "Who am I? How do I fit in? Where am I going in life?" Having achieved a sense of identity, the individual is then able to develop a sense of "fidelity" or faithfulness to other relationships and ideas.[88]

Early Adulthood – Ages Nineteen to Forty – Intimacy Versus Isolation

Having established a sense of identity, the young adult begins to be ready to make long-term commitments to others, forming intimate, reciprocal relationships with friends or a marriage partner, willing to make the sacrifices and compromises that such relationships require.[89]

Building on Erikson's work, Daniel Levinson, professor of psychology at Yale University School of Medicine from 1966 till 1990, also contributed to the study of adult development. Researching in the 1970s, Levinson suggested three major eras of early, middle, and late adulthood, with early adulthood covering the stages of life between ages seventeen and forty. In his book, *Seasons of a Man's Life*,[90] he divides early male adulthood into four stages, as follows:

Ages Seventeen to Twenty Two – the Early Adult Transition

This is the period at the end of adolescence, when a young man modifies his relationships with his family and society to become more independent, typically through moving out of the family home or moving geographically to attend college or find work.

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[88] Les L. Steele, "The Power of Erikson," in *Nurture That Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education*, eds. James C Wilhoit, John M. Dettoni (Grand Rapids, MI: Bridgepoint Books, 1998). 97.

[89] Ibid., 98.

[90] Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

Ages Twenty-Three to Twenty-Eight – Entering the Adult World

In this stage, the young male makes initial choices about career and begins the search for a marriage partner. If he marries early in this period, he takes on the heavy financial and psychological responsibilities of parenthood and providing for his wife and children, often including the purchase of property.

Ages Twenty-Nine to Thirty-Three – The Age Thirty Transition

Levinson found that around the age of thirty, men often reconsider choices made and directions set in earlier years and rework their attitudes, priorities, and aspirations. They may even adjust their life direction at this time.

Ages Thirty-Four to Forty – Settling Down

Following the Age Thirty Transition, most men enter a stage of relative stability, concentrating on advancement in their chosen career and family life.

Emerging Adulthood

In the years since Erikson and Levinson published the results of their research, significant changes have occurred in most Western societies, resulting in a postponement of the age at which many people reach traditional markers of adulthood. In the 1970s, by the age of twenty-three or twenty-four, a typical man had finished his education, entered the job market, married, and fathered children—and was thus regarded as an adult. But this is no longer the case.

First, with regard to education and career, recent years have seen a marked increase in the number of young people accessing higher education, as well as an increase in the length of time spent in college and university. For example, in the United Kingdom, between the years 1960 and 2006, the number of students in higher education

multiplied by a factor of seven.[91] Furthermore, while between the years 1980 and 2006

the proportion of young men (aged seventeen to twenty) enrolled in higher education

courses increased from about fourteen percent to around thirty-one percent, the

proportion of young women increased from eleven percent to around thirty-eight percent

in the same period, overtaking the figure for young men.[92]

Also, the length of time students spend completing their education has increased,

due, for example, to the introduction of four-year primary master's degree programs,

sandwich degrees (which include a one-year industrial placement), post-graduate degrees,

and the professional qualifications required for many occupations. Another delaying

factor has been the increasing popularity of "gap years," which are breaks from education

to give opportunity for international travel and work, or some kind of charitable service,

often in a third-world country. Internships have also become increasingly popular, either

as a first step to full-time employment or as a trial to "test the waters" of some particular

occupation.

In terms of marriage and parenthood, in most Western countries the age at which

young people marry has changed markedly, regardless of when they finish their

education. People commonly relate the origin of this trend to the introduction of the

contraceptive pill in the 1960s, which made it possible for young people to enjoy sexual

relationships with several successive partners without the danger of pregnancy. Since the

sexual revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s, sexual relationships outside of marriage

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[91] Haroon Chowdry, Claire Crawford, Lorraine Dearden, Alissa Goodman, and Anna Vignoles, *Widening Participation in Higher Education Analysis Using Linked Administrative Data* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010), 5.

[92] Stijn Broecke and Joseph Hamed, *Gender Gaps in Higher Education Participation: An Analysis of the Relationship between Prior Attainment and Young Participation by Gender, Socio-Economic Class and Ethnicity* (London: Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, DIUS Research Report; 08 14, 2008), www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/corporate/MigratedD/publications/D/*DIUS_RR_08_14.pdf* (16 April 2013).

have become increasingly acceptable in secular society. Indeed, living together before marriage is often now regarded as good and wise preparation for marriage.

As a result, the average age of marriage for men in Northern Ireland has risen from twenty-seven in 1980 to nearly thirty-four in 2010 and, for women, from twenty-four to twenty-nine.[93] The average age for women giving birth in Northern Ireland was twenty-seven in 1980, and thirty in 2010.[94]

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, research professor in the department of psychology at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, first coined the term "emerging adulthood" to account for the above demographic trend. In his research, Arnett found that young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight to thirty typically do not regard themselves as having reached adulthood, yet their stage of life is quite different from adolescence—hence the term "emerging adulthood." In his 2004 book, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*,[95] Arnett suggests that the reasons for the emergence of this new developmental stage include the changing patterns in education and sexual behavior introduced above, as well as and the changing role of and expectations for women. But Arnett also highlights an enthusiasm among emerging adults to take advantage of the independence and freedom this stage of life gives them for identity and role exploration. Arnett explains:

> It is not that (emerging adults) do not want marriage, a home, and (one or two) children – eventually. Most of them do want to take on all of these adult obligations, and most of them will have done so by the time they reach age 30. It is just that, in their late teens and early twenties they ponder these obligations and think, "Yes, but *not yet*." Adulthood and its obligations offer security and

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[93] Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency, "Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2010" (Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency, 2011), 31.
[94]Ibid., 16.
[95] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

stability, but they also represent a closing of doors – the end of independence, and the end of spontaneity, the end of a sense of wide-open possibilities.[96]

The researcher will now review what Arnett suggests are the five main features of emerging adulthood.

It is the age of identity explorations, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.

Although Erikson associated the process of identity formation with adolescence, he too was open to the idea that questions of identity are not completely settled until the mid or late twenties.[97, 98] This is especially true in modern industrial societies, since it takes people so long to gain the skills needed for adulthood's tasks in an increasingly technological world.[99] Arnett suggests that for those growing up today, while identity formation begins in adolescence, that formation intensifies in emerging adulthood. This is a time of finding out who one is and what kind of adult life one wants to pursue, mainly in terms of life and work.

This is also time of ideological exploration, where one ponders what one believes about the big questions of life. Arnett quotes several studies that indicate the importance of forming a distinctive set of beliefs about moral and religious issues as one of the criteria young people view as most important to becoming an adult.[100] Arnett highlights the importance emerging adults attach to forming their own views, independent of those taught by the religious tradition in which they were brought up.

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[96] Ibid., 6.

[97] Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther; a Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, Austen Riggs Monograph (New York: Norton, 1962).

[98] Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: Norton, 1969).

[99] Francis L. Gross, *Introducing Erik Erikson: An Invitation to His Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 39.

[100] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Lene Arnett Jensen, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, no. 5 (2002): 452.

In terms of love, most emerging adults enter into a series of relationships with a view to answering the question, "Is this the kind of person who would be a good partner for me for life?" For many, this involves cohabitation, the goal being not merely a reliable marriage partner, but a "soul mate," someone who will provide the ideal complement to one's own identity. The emerging adult stage gives opportunity to explore possibilities and move towards enduring choices in these different realms.

With respect to identity exploration and work, Arnett describes emerging adulthood as a period of trying out a series of educational and occupational paths in search of a job that provides an ideal identity fit. He says, "In work as in love, expectations are high. The goal is not to find a mere job, but a job that is self-fulfilling, enjoyable, and personally satisfying – in short, a job that is an expression of one's identity."[101]

Instability

One result of the identity explorations of emerging adults is that this period is a time of great excitement. However, it is also a very unstable time. For Arnett, this instability is highlighted by the number of moves emerging adults typically make from one residence to another: leaving home to move to college; changing roommates year to year; moving in with a romantic partner, moving out again; changing college courses; taking time out for travel, voluntary service or work experience; moving into work, perhaps back to further education; and even perhaps moving back with parents for a time. With each move, the young person is exploring, learning, and hopefully refining the plan they envisage for their life ahead.

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[101] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 10.

A Self-Focused Age

Arnett states that "there is no time in life that is more self-focused [than emerging adulthood]." No longer subject to the structures of home and school life, but having not yet taken on the responsibilities of marriage, parenthood, and permanent employment, emerging adults enjoy unprecedented freedom to concentrate on developing their own skills, exploring their identity, laying a foundation for adult life, and achieving the self-sufficiency upon which mature commitments to others, in love and work, will be built.

The Age of Feeling In-between

Not surprisingly, Arnett has found that those in their twenties, while they recognize that they have moved well beyond adolescence, emerging adults typically find it difficult to think of themselves as adults. Indeed, a fully developed sense of being adult does not come until people are well through their thirties and even into their forties. Part of the reason for this is the criteria that emerging adults use to define adulthood. These criteria tend not to be the traditional, more external criteria of being married, owning a home, and finishing education, but rather they are more internal things, such as accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.

The Age of Possibilities

With many, if not all options still open, and before many of the hard realities of life hit home, emerging adults tend to have a strong sense of optimism and a sense that almost anything is possible. A June 1997 article in *Time* magazine illustrates this optimistic attitude. In the article, writer Margot Hornblower shares a national survey of eighteen to twenty-four year-olds, ninety-six percent of whom agreed with the statement,

"I am very sure that someday I will get to where I want to be in life."[102] Arnett emphasizes the importance of this sense of possibility for those who have come from difficult home and family situations and are now able to move away and make new, positive beginnings for themselves.

Arnett recognizes that since the phenomenon of emerging adulthood is a product of cultural changes in Western societies, its actual manifestation in any society will be subject to variation dependent on the values and societal trends in that particular culture at any point in time. He[103] and other researchers[104] have documented the rise of emerging adulthood in various westernized countries, with particular variations on the theme reflecting the culture in each place.

The Religious Lives of Emerging Adults

One of the most important contributions to an understanding of the religious life of emerging adults, especially those at the younger end of this stage, has been the work of Christian Smith, professor of sociology and director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame. In his book, co-authored with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*,[105] the authors analyze and interpret data from the third wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion. This survey originally surveyed and interviewed a cross-section of thirteen to nineteen year-olds and has continued to follow these young people as they have grown older. *Souls in Transition* is therefore based on a nationally

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[102]Margot Hornblower, "Great Xpectations of So-Called Slackers," *Time*, June 09, 1997, 84.

[103] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood(S): The Cultural Psychology of a New Life Stage," in *Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology: New Syntheses in Theory, Research and Policy*, ed. Lene Arnett Jensen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[104] Carrie B. Douglass, "From Duty to Desire: Emerging Adulthood in Europe and Its Consequences," *Child development Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (2007).

[105] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*.

representative telephone survey of 2,458 people, ages eighteen to twenty-three, followed by personal interviews with 230 of these emerging adults from forty-five American states.

In their analysis, Smith and Snell have found that younger emerging adults can be classified by six major religious types.[106] First, Committed Traditionalists (comprising some fifteen percent of the total) have a strong faith, which they can clearly articulate and which they put into practice in the context of a mainstream faith tradition. Their basic orientation can be summarized as "I am really committed." Second, Selective Adherents (around thirty percent) believe and practice certain aspects of their religious tradition but neglect and ignore others. The outlook of these emerging adults can be summarized by "I do some of what I can." Third, Spiritually Open young people (fifteen percent) are not personally very committed, but are nonetheless receptive to and at least mildly interested in some spiritual or religious matters. Their outlook might be summarized as "There's probably something more out there." Fourth, Religiously Indifferent (at least twenty-five percent) emerging adults are simply not very interested in religion. They do not oppose religion and may profess some nominal assent to some religious tradition, but it is so much in the background of their lives as to be mostly a matter of complete indifference. Their attitude is typically "It just doesn't matter much." Fifth, Religiously Disconnected Emerging Adults (perhaps five percent of the total) typically had little or no exposure to religion in their upbringing and have little or no connection to it in the present. They would say, "I really don't know what you are talking about." Finally, Irreligious Emerging Adults (comprising no more than ten percent) are skeptical towards religion and generally critical of it. They may concede that religion is functionally good for some

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[106]Ibid., 166ff.

people, but their attitude is typically incredulous, derogatory, and antagonistic. Their attitude is "Religion just makes no sense."

In the concluding chapter of *Souls in Transition*, the authors summarize their findings. In contrast to the findings of some other researchers, such as Arnett,[107] Smith and Snell found that there is a large degree of continuity between the religious practice and commitment (or lack of it) among adolescents and those same young people as they move into emerging adulthood.[108] More than half of the emerging adults in this study maintained a stable level of religious commitment, whether that level of commitment was high, moderate or low. A further forty percent of emerging adults did exhibit a change in the level of their commitment. These tended to be from among the ranks of those whose initial religious commitment was either moderate or low, and their religious interest declined still further. A small minority however, did actually counter the dominant trend by becoming much more committed to religious faith and practice. These converts to religious faith tended to come from the ranks of those who showed the lowest interest in religion as teenagers.[109]

With social support for religion removed, many emerging adults move away from religious practice. But by no means do all of them move away from it; a sizable minority do show a serious devotion to their religion. These tend to be from among those who had most investment in their religion in the first place, but they also include a small number who experience some sort of "conversion" experience.

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[107] Arnett and Jensen, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults."

[108] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 282.

[109] Ibid.

Another finding of this study, which tends to contradict common assumptions is the strength of parental influence on the lives of their children. In contrast to what is often assumed, the authors find:

> ... when it comes to religion, parents are in fact *hugely* important. Of the many teenage-era factors that our study investigated as possible influences on emerging adult religious outcomes one of the most powerful factors was the religious lives of their parents – how often they attended religious services, how important religious faith was in their own lives, and so on.[110]

The importance of the influence of parents was found to be much more significant than the influence of peers. The influence of other significant adults in teenagers' lives was also a strong predictor of the continuity of religious commitment through emerging adulthood.

As Smith and Snell assert, all the disruptions, transitions, explorations, and distractions, as well as the re-negotiating of relationships with parents, friends, former adult mentors, and others, that are characteristic of this stage in life, pose "challenges for sustaining religious commitments, investments and practices."[111] The result is that emerging adults tend to be "significantly less religious in a variety of ways than older adults,"[112] although Smith and Snell have found that "Catholic and mainline Protestant emerging adults tend specially to be less religious than evangelical Protestants and black Protestants."[113]

However, Smith and Snell argue that the evidence they present in *Souls in Transition* does not show a massive secularization of emerging adults in recent years. They explain, "In short, emerging adults are as a whole less religious than are older

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[110] Ibid., 285.
[111] Ibid., 280.
[112] Ibid., 281.
[113] Ibid.

adults and than they themselves were when they were teenagers; but today's emerging

adults do not appear to be dramatically less religious than former generations of emerging

adults have been, at least going back to the early 1970s."[114] Numerous studies over many

years have shown that, while religious observance tends to fall off among young adults as

they leave adolescence, an increased participation in religion tends to occur when these

same young adults marry, have children and "settle down" personally and

geographically.[115]

However, a more important issue for emerging adults, as Smith and Snell suggest,

is not so much their nominal religious commitment or observance, but their widespread

use of a relativistic and pluralistic lens through which they see matters of religion,

morality and every other aspect of life. While most emerging adults have a positive view

of religion and, for many, religious practice is desirable, religion is just not very

important to them. According to Smith and Snell,

> ... among emerging adults, religious beliefs do not seem to be important, action-driving commitments, but rather mental assents to ideas that have few obvious consequences. What actually do have the power and authority to drive life instead are the feelings and inclinations of the emerging adults themselves. They as individuals can determine what is right, worthy and important. So they themselves can pick and choose from religions to take or leave what they want.[116]

Aware of the "relativity of their own cultural and social locations," emerging adults often

have little confidence in the possibility of "holding true beliefs, rendering valid judgment

and making worthy commitments."[117]

Smith and Snell see this lack of confidence within what they term "the

contemporary crisis of knowledge and value,"[118] which makes it difficult, if not

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[114] Ibid.
[115] See Arnett and Jensen, "A Congregation of One: Individualized," 451-452.
[116] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 286.
[117] Ibid., 287.

impossible, to say that anything is objectively real or true in such a way as to require people to change their minds or lives. Everyone is entitled to an opinion, and all opinions are equally valid and must not be criticized, for fear that the one offering critique or asking questions will seem presumptuous, intolerant, or unfeeling. The result is that emerging adults

> ...are determined to be free. But they do not know what is worth doing with their freedom. They work very hard to stand on their own two feet. But they do not really know where they ought to go and why, once they are standing. They lack larger visions of what is true and real and good, in both the private and the public realms.[119]

Into this moral vacuum come such things as the demands of mass consumerism, the amusements of alcohol and drug intoxication, and the temporary thrills of casual sex. Although many young emerging adults find this lifestyle ultimately dissatisfying and long for something real and true, in the mean time they "carry on as best they can as sovereign, autonomous, empowered individuals who lack a reliable basis for any particular conviction or direction by which to guide their lives."[120] Smith and Snell feel that this epistemological crisis must be addressed by American society if that society is to prosper in any sense. Churches also must address the social, cultural, and institutional structures and forces that govern emerging adulthood if they are to reach out to this generation and those that follow.[121]

Popular Christian Publishing

Having surveyed the statistical data on the absence of men from church life, the subject of masculinity from both secular academic and Christian theological perspectives,

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[118] Ibid., 292.
[119] Ibid., 294.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 299.

and the particular characteristics, both general and religious, of young men in today's Western society, the researcher will next consider some of the more popular Christian publications that respond to these issues and seek to make practical applications for the life of the church today. Consider first, in its historic context, what has been called the Christian Men's Movement, a movement that has emerged from the more general Men's Movement of the 1970s.

<div align="center">The Men's Movement</div>

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s stimulated academic interest in masculinity and gender relations. Feminism and the social changes generated by it also raised questions in the wider culture concerning male identity and the role of men in family life and society. This led to the emergence in the 1980s and 90s of the secular "Men's Movement." Under this general umbrella were, first, those who advocated the "liberation" of men from stereotypical roles and the rights of men in family law; second, those such as Warren Farrell,[122] who sought to enhance understanding between the sexes; and third, those belonging to what is called the "mythopoetic men's movement," popularized by Robert Bly's book *Iron John*.[123] Bly sought to find insights into the roles of men and women through the exegesis of traditional fairy tales, with reference to Jungian psychology and the results of anthropological research, for example in the area of initiation practices in various cultures.

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[122] Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). Also, Warren Farrell, *Why Men Are the Way They Are: The Male-Female Dynamic* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

[123] Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

The Christian Men's Movement

It is in this context that an equivalent movement among Christians and Christian writers arose, again in response to the feminist movement and the changes in social attitudes that resulted from it. The Christian Men's Movement began in the 1980s and came to prominence in the 1990s, especially through the Promise Keepers' movement. This organization seeks to encourage Christian men to inspire and challenge each other to a more active commitment to Christ and a more positive role in family and church life.[124]

A variety of writers have explored the subject of masculinity and what it means to be a Christian man, and a number have addressed the specific issue that is at the heart of this research: why men tend to be under-represented in the life of today's churches. Writers such as John Eldridge,[125] Stu Weber,[126] and Paul Coughlin[127] have dealt with role and identity issues, while men such as David Murrow[128] and Patrick Morley[129] have sought to address directly the question of gender imbalance in church life. The sermons and conference addresses of Mark Driscoll[130] have also been widely quoted on the role of men in the church. Some of these authors have developed Web-based ministries, such as Ransomed Heart Ministries[131] (Eldredge), Man in the Mirror[132] (Morely), and Church for Men[133] (Murrow). Godmen[134] is a ministry led by the comedian Brad Stine.

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[124] website: promisekeepers.org.

[125] John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Passionate Soul of a Man* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 2001).

[126]Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior: God's Intention for a Man* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1993).

[127] Paul T. Coughlin, *No More Christian Nice Guy: Why Being Nice Instead of Good Hurts Men, Women, and Children* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005); Paul T. Coughlin, *Unleashing Courageous Faith: The Hidden Power of a Man's Soul* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009).

[128] Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church.*

[129] Patrick M. Morley, *The Man in the Mirror: Solving the 24 Problems Men Face* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992).

[130] Available in audio or text form at www.marshillchurch.org/media/sermons.

[131] See ransomedheartministries.com.

[132] See maninthemirror.org.

[133] See chruchformen.com.

These authors seek to portray a view of masculinity that is based on biblical teaching and confirmed by academic research. At least some of their arguments, however, rest on assertions that are assumed to be self-evident and obvious or are derived from the authors' personal experiences. The characteristics they emphasize as most typical of men include an eagerness to take risks, show courage, and respond to challenges; a willingness for heroic sacrifice; an emotional stoicism; a desire for achievement and status and a respect for competence; a pragmatic, down-to-earth, action-rather than verbal-orientated approach; and an avoidance of anything men regard as feminine.

The most common portrayal of authentic masculinity, according to Christian Men's Movement authors, is a "warrior spirit." Eldredge says that men's greatest needs are for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.[135] One of his main emphases is on the importance of a man finding his authentic self and overcoming the wounds he has received through inadequate parenting, especially what Eldridge styles the "father wound."[136] In this emphasis, he borrows extensively from Robert Bly.[137]

Stu Weber and the Promise Keepers emphasize the leadership responsibility given to men. The core of Weber's vision is what he calls the four pillars of a man's heart: the Heart of a King, the Heart of a Warrior, the Heart of a Mentor. and the Heart of a Friend. Taking a more pragmatic approach, David Murrow analyzes the life of the modern church in terms of what secular scholars would term the hegemonic masculinity of popular Western culture. In common with others in the Christian Men's Movement, he

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[134] See godmen.org.
[135] Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 9ff.
[136] Ibid., 66f., e.g.
[137] Robert Bly, *Iron John.*

sees the main reason for men's lack of involvement in the church and for their lack of

response to the gospel as what they deem the "feminization of the church," which is a

pressure on men to be soft, compliant, and tame.

Murrow helpfully describes Western hegemonic masculinity by analogizing it to

the film industry. Films designed to be attractive to men tend to be action-packed, with

lots of fighting, car chases, "tension, intrigue, and a hero who saves the world against

impossible odds," whereas those targeting a female audience, "…include lots of clever

dialogue, beautiful costumes, flowers, and scenery. The movie will star a handsome

couple who, after a series of misadventures, end up in a happy relationship."[138] "Films,"

he maintains, "reflect our fantasies. Men fantasize about saving the world against

impossible odds. Women fantasize about having a relationship with a wonderful man."[139]

But today's churches, Murrow argues, tend to emphasize women's values,

especially a personal relationship with Jesus and healthy relationships with others.

He states, "…few churches model men's values; risk and reward, accomplishment, heroic

sacrifice, action and adventure."[140] Murrow's thoughts are typical of many authors, and

he laments, "Almost everything about today's church – its teaching style, its ministries,

the way people are expected to behave, even today's popular image of Jesus – is designed

to meet the needs and expectations of a largely female audience. Church is sweet and

sentimental, nurturing and *nice*."[141]

Mark Driscoll is the source of many colorful quotations on this topic. One of

Driscoll's main concerns is an over-emphasis on the "bride" image in scripture and the

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[138] Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 15.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 14.

idea of a personal relationship with Christ, which he contends is not an explicit scriptural concept.[142] Driscoll also critiques the traditional masculine stereotypes, appealing to the example of Jesus and contending that Christian men should be both tough and tender, and in particular should be ready to shoulder responsibility for themselves and others, especially in terms of their personal relationship to God.[143]

Authors from a Catholic and Anglo-catholic background have also addressed this issue. Writing in *Touchstone Magazine*[144] in 2001, Leon Podles traces the feminization of the church to the writings of the female mystics of the Middle Ages, who tended to see their personal relationships with Jesus in strongly erotic terms. In this context, the influence of Aristotelian philosophy, he suggests, led to a view that women are more naturally religious than men, and that as the bride of Christ, the church should exhibit more feminine characteristics.

<div align="center">Critique</div>

Numerous articles, internet blogs, and reviews have been published in response to and in critique of the Evangelical Christian Men's Movement. A representative sample will be considered here. Sally Gallagher and Sabrina Wood conducted a study in 2005[145] in which they interviewed people from three different groups of evangelical men and women who had read John Eldredge's book, *Wild at Heart*. One group consisted of selected members of an evangelical campus ministry, while two other groups consisted of

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[142] Mark Driscoll and Grace Driscoll, *Real Marriage; the Truth About Sex, Friendship and Life Together* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012).
[143]Ibid.
[144] Leon J. Podles, "Missing Fathers of the Church: the Feminization of the Church and the Need for Christian Fatherhood," *Touchstone*, January/February 2001, 26-32.
[145] Sally K. Gallagher and Sabrina L. Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild? Transformations in Conservative Protestant Masculinity," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 2 (2005): 135-159.

predominantly middle-aged, married members of two local congregations, one

Presbyterian Church USA, the other, Assemblies of God.

The response of the campus group was strongly polarized. The men identified

strongly with the ideas of men's "instinctive need" for adventure and women's need to be

viewed as a "beauty to be rescued."[146] However, the women, in Gallagher and Woods'

words, "hated" the book[147]. They explain, "Like the men in the fellowship, the women

also read *Wild at Heart* as confirmation of gender stereotypes.…while this was good

news for the men, it was acutely bad news for the women – especially the notion that

'everyone has to look like this.'"[148] While Eldredge's portrayal of men and women might

have some legitimacy, the women in the study felt that he exaggerates the characteristics

he describes and that he applies them far too narrowly. Objecting to the idea that

femininity is simply an inversion of idealized masculinity, these women reported that for

them strength, courage, and adventure are generally human characteristics, not gender-

specific characteristics. Gallagher and Woods note:

> Not only did these women believe that love for adventure and risk-taking are
> distributed to various degrees across women and men, they saw these as narrow
> caricatures of the real men with whom they were friends. In some cases, they
> thought "dangerous" and "free" might describe some of the men they knew. But
> they also knew women who were like that and some men who were not.[149]

Both the men and women from the campus ministry also questioned strongly the degree

to which Eldredge's image of godly manhood could be applied across race and class. Not

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[146] Ibid., 145.
[147] Ibid., 146.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 147.

all men grow up in an environment where they have opportunities for all the adventurous activities Eldredge seems to assume.[150]

The response of the older men and women in the congregational samples was more measured and less polarized—tempered, it would seem, by their greater experience of real life as husbands and wives. While the men were encouraged by Eldredge to live life with more courage and commitment, both they and their wives also felt that Eldredge's generalizations were too narrow. They did not identify with Eldredge's suggestion of the need to heal "the father wound," but were challenged to re-consider their own role as fathers.

Gallagher and Wood concur with the results of another study,[151] conducted by the same Sally Gallagher along with Christian Smith. These researchers interviewed 265 evangelical men and women across twenty-three American states to "assess the degree to which contemporary evangelical ideals of men's headship challenge, as well as reinforce, a hegemonic masculinity."[152] The results of this study were that "the majority of contemporary evangelicals hold to 'symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism;'" that is, while nominally assenting to traditional male/female roles, they practice a much more pragmatic, egalitarian approach in their own relationships.[153]

Coming from a more liberal Christian point of view, psychologist Richard Beck, in his blog "Experimental Theology,"[154] agrees with Mark Driscoll and Leon Podles' concern that "given a certain kind of gender self-image," some men have difficulty with

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[150] Ibid., 145, 148.

[151] Sally K. Gallagher and Christian Smith, "Symbolic Traditionalism and Pragmatic Egalitarianism: Contemporary Evangelicals, Families, and Gender," *Gender & Society* 13, no. 2 (1999): 211-213.

[152] Ibid., 211.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Richard Beck, "Thoughts on Mark Driscoll... While I'm Knitting," in *Experimental Theology* (2009), http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com. (26 January 2011)

biblical imagery that portrays the church as the bride of Christ and believers as children of God. However, he distinguishes between masculinity and "agency," the term psychologists prefer to use for the personality trait "associated with motives for control, power, independence, and dominance."[155] He feels that it is important to distinguish stereotypical male gender role interests, such as fixing cars and shooting, from agentic personality motives. Beck is happy with the emphasis, found in the works of Driscoll and others, on affirming stereotypical male gender interests, but he rejects what he sees as chauvinism and misogyny. Referring to "certain impulses one finds in the Christian men's movements," he says, "Specifically, the assertion of masculinity implies a suppression of women and a restoration of male power over women. To be a 'Christian man' means 'reclaiming' and 'taking back' leadership roles in both family and the church. Men use spiritual warrant to assert power over women."[156]

An example of a response to the Christian Men's Movement from within the evangelical community is an article by Brandon O'Brien,[157] assistant editor for *Leadership* magazine. Responding mainly to Murrow, Driscoll, and Coughlin, O'Brien readily agrees that in the church "a certain type of man is conspicuously absent"[158]: that is, the strong, heroic, risk-taking, action-orientated sort of man who fits the traditional mold espoused by these writers. O'Brien also agrees that Jesus Christ has often been portrayed as overly "meek and mild," and that much of church life has digressed from radical discipleship to simple moralizing, becoming far too sentimental and sweet.

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[155] Ibid., 2.
[156] Ibid., 3.
[157] Brandon O'Brien, "A Jesus for Real Men; What the New Masculinity Movement Gets Right and Wrong," *Christianity Today* 52, no. 4 (April 2008): 48-52
[158] Ibid., 1.

However, O'Brien finds in these authors, first, a far too narrow definition of masculinity and also a tendency to assume that the answer to putting the church right is simply to make it masculine. He argues that "the Fall has done more damage to the human heart than the masculinity movement seems willing to admit;" men's instincts are corrupted by sin, and while, for example, "a man's urge for battle…may well be natural…that doesn't automatically make it godly."[159] By over-emphasizing what it interprets as masculine qualities in Jesus, O'Brien believes that the Men's Movement tends to exclude women from real discipleship. As the "image of the invisible God,"[160] O'Brien notes, "[Jesus] is not simply the perfect male; he is the perfect human being. Through his obedience to the Father, Christ exhibited the qualities that should characterize all believers, both male and female."[161]

The Christian Men's Movement has, therefore, spawned a great deal of literature and discussion, both in print and internet form. From the popularity of this material among Christian men, it is clear that it has "struck a nerve" and identified real issues in the life of today's church. As with much popular publishing, this writing often tends to be subjective, and some of it is both academically and theologically questionable. In particular, it can at times place too much emphasis on stereotypes, and it may fail to recognize the variety of personalities and outlooks that clearly exists among both men and women. However, much helpful information has also resulted from the recent efforts to identify trends in church life that have tended to ostracize or frustrate men. Further, recently developed strategies for addressing the needs of men, when these are both academically and theologically well founded, are also helpful.

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[159] Ibid., 3.
[160] Col. 1:15
[161] O'Brien, 3.

Summary of Literature Review

The secular research on the subject of masculinity has shown that a fairly constant set of male personality traits exist across cultures, and that these characteristics result partly from genetic inheritance and partly from socialization as boys grow into men. There is also, however, a great deal of variability in personality traits among men – as there is among women. This conclusion is in general agreement with the consistent witness of the Bible, that while men and women are equal in value and dignity, they are created to have different, but complementary roles. The distinct role assigned in the Bible to men is one of leadership in marriage, in family life, and in the church family.

Research into the distinct developmental characteristics of men in the targeted age-range has revealed the relatively new stage in human development encompassing this demographic, referred to as emerging adulthood. These young adults are no longer adolescents, but they are not yet adults, and they have particular characteristics that must be taken into account by churches seeking to work with them.

Popular Christian publishing has revealed both strengths and weaknesses, generally correlating with how faithful the authors are to both biblical teaching and scientific research. While a certain caution is necessary, helpful ideas and approaches have been found in this literature.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

In this study, the researcher examined the process whereby certain PCI churches have successfully drawn young men from the periphery of congregational life into active Christian discipleship. The study investigated this process both from the point of view of each pastor and from the point of view of each young man involved. Since the study emphasized this process and the experiences of those intimately involved in it, the research design followed a qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, identifies the key philosophical assumption of qualitative research: "that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds."[162] She continues, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences that they have in the world."[163] This approach helps the researcher to focus on the personal processes being investigated.

Merriam identifies three further characteristics of qualitative research: the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, and an inductive research strategy resulting in a richly descriptive analysis of a particular phenomenon. Such a study may yield results that are transferable to other similar situations.

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[162] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 6-8.
[163] Ibid.

Design Tools

This research required participants who are able to communicate in depth about the way PCI ministers have helped young men in the eighteen to thirty age-group, initially on the periphery of church life, move towards active spiritual involvement in the church. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of people from two separate populations: pastors who have seen substantial success in drawing young men to active spiritual involvement, and young men who have been drawn to active spiritual involvement at this stage in their lives.

In Merriam's words, "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."[164] She quotes Chein:

> The situation is analogous to one in which a number of expert consultants…are called in on a difficult medical case. These consultants are not called in to get an average opinion that would correspond to the average opinion of the entire medical profession. They are called in precisely because of their special experience and competence.[165]

It was necessary for this study, therefore, to identify congregations within the PCI that have achieved singular success in ministry to men. The researcher chose from these examples of best practice five ministers to interview, as well as three young men whose ministers suggested them as good samples from whom the most could be learned for the purposes of this study: - that is, they are the sort of men normally regarded as largely absent from the more spiritual activities of church life (such as prayer, Bible study and worship). To maximize the breadth of the samples, the researcher avoided selecting

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[164] Ibid., 61.
[165] Ibid.

ministers and young men from the same congregations. The researcher thus collected data from a total of six congregations, with some data from a seventh.

The researcher communicated with ministers throughout the different PCI presbyteries, who have local knowledge of successful ministry to men in their local area. With their assistance, the researcher identified congregations having the necessary criteria to participate in the study. Through this initial informal survey, the researcher queried a large enough sample so that multiple respondents identified the examples of best practice.

For the purposes of this study, a successful ministry to men was understood to be one in which significant numbers of young men have been attracted to a saving faith in Christ and from there have moved into active, mature discipleship. An attempt was made as far as possible to identify young men who illustrate this maturity with significant involvement and service within the life of the congregation and with effective witness in the world outside the congregation. Also for the purposes of this study, a "ministry to men" does not necessarily refer to a specific, organized men's ministry. The important criterion is that men are being drawn to mature discipleship.

The researcher selected congregations from a geographical spread within the PCI and from a variety of location types, i.e., urban, suburban, and rural. Since the purpose of the research was to isolate factors that other pastors can apply generally to their own congregations, the researcher attempted to select congregations whose success in reaching young men is not particularly dependent on the personality of the minister or on other atypical local factors.

Via an introductory email followed by a personal telephone call, the researcher asked ministers of selected congregations to participate in the study. The researcher requested that some ministers participate as respondents; and he requested that others recommend young men who have been discipled through their congregations' ministries. The researcher contacted these young men via an introductory letter, followed by a personal telephone call. All participants were given opportunity to read and sign a research consent form, and the researcher explained the procedures to be followed.

The researcher invited each participant to take part in a semi-structured interview at a time and location convenient for that participant. The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interview questions facilitates a flexible approach that builds on participants' responses to complex issues in order to explore the issues more thoroughly.[166] Analysis of each interview occurred before the next interview took place, thus fostering the best implementation of this responsive procedure and enabling the process to move in whatever direction the pertinent data took it. The researcher arranged the interviews as far in advance as possible, scheduling them to occur within a particular two-week period, so that the data from previous interviews remained fresh in the interviewer's mind. The researcher recorded each interview, using an unobtrusive digital recording device.

Additional documentation from the interviews included the researcher's brief field notes, regarding such things as body language, emotion, and anything that the sound recording could not capture. Finally, the researcher noted in writing any further descriptive or reflective observations immediately after each interview. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed each recording into writing, using a word processor. The researcher then analyzed these documents using the constant comparative

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[166] Ibid., 72-75.

method,[167] enabling the data to be coded and categorized so that common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views could emerge across the variation of participants.

The proposed initial interview protocol was as follows. The questions below have been informed by the literature, and the interviewer refined them further in response to the explanations and descriptions that emerged from constant comparison during the interviewing process.

<div align="center">Interview Protocol – Five Ministers</div>

- o In your experience, what are some male characteristics of which we should be aware in order to engage men with the church's message and draw them into more active involvement in the church?

- o With these characteristics in mind, what aspects of today's church culture and practice tend to put men off?

- o How can church practice and culture be changed to make men feel more comfortable?

- o What aspects of the Christian message make it particularly attractive to men, and what aspects can tend to put them off? What are some possible misunderstandings of which we need to be aware?

- o What are the particular characteristics of today's young men, ages 18-30, that we need to bear in mind when seeking to engage with them?

- o Again, what barriers do we need to remove, and what strategies can we use, to engage these young men with the Christian message?

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[167] Ibid., 179-184.

o What strategies have you used that you have found to be successful in drawing young men into active involvement in the spiritual life of your church?

(How have you adjusted your preaching and leading worship?)

(How have you stimulated involvement in prayer, Bible study, witness, service?)

(Have you organized a specific men's ministry or young adults' ministry?)

Interview Protocol – Three Young Men

o Describe how your Christian life has been over the last few years.

(The interviewer worded the following questions according to the participant's answer to this first one.)

o Which things have tended to keep you from being involved in church?

(Things to do with the gospel message or your understanding of it?)

(Things to do with how we do things in church?)

(Lifestyle issues?)

o Which of these things do you think apply generally to men? And young men of your age?

o What were the things that attracted you?

(Again, consider gospel message, church culture, etc.)

o What were the issues that inhibited your active discipleship?

(Especially note involvement in Bible study, corporate prayer,

witness, service.)

- o What encouraged you to a more active discipleship?

- o What activities organized by the church were most helpful to you?

Limitations of the Study

As stated in the previous section, this study was limited to the context of

congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Some of the study's findings

may be generalized to other denominations in Ireland, the United Kingdom, or beyond,

but readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of the conclusions

should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, the

readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their

context. The results of this study may also have implications for older men, adolescents

or even young women.

Researcher Position

There are at least four areas or biases that affect the research stance. The first area

is that the researcher is himself a man who has his own assumptions and prejudices about

what constitutes or should constitute masculinity. His self-image in some ways fits and in

some ways doesn't quite fit the traditional male image assumed in his culture. His

observation and analysis are inevitably affected by his own life experiences and up-

bringing. On the other hand, of course, as a man, the researcher can identify with many of

the issues raised in the literature and in the interviews. Also, the researcher is a man aged

fifty-six, who inevitably makes assumptions about men in general, and younger men in

particular, that may not be valid.

Secondly, the researcher is a Christian disciple, with his own lifetime of experience in the church. To some extent, this makes it difficult for him to be objective when discussing various aspects of church culture that may be either off-putting or attractive to the men who are the subject of this study. This experience, however, also strengthens the researcher's ability to analyze the data with insight.

A third bias is that the researcher is himself a minister within the denomination that is the context of the study. His own experiences of trying to reach and disciple men give him both insights and probably also blind-spots when researching the issues relevant to this study.

A fourth bias is that the researcher is a Christian with certain views on the authority of the Bible. He believes that its authority extends over all areas of life, including the roles of men and women in society, within the family and in the church. This stance inevitably becomes a lens through which the researcher views the data.

Being aware of these biases is, of course, a significant first step towards being objective in recording and analyzing data and interpreting the research and views of others.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to consider how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have helped men in the age-group eighteen to thirty, who are on the periphery of congregational life, to become more actively involved in the spiritual life of their local Church. The following three research questions were framed to guide the study:

1. What issues tend to prevent men, ages eighteen to thirty, from active spiritual involvement in the church?

    a) as men?

    b) at this stage in life?

    c) in church culture?

2. What aspects of church life tend to attract these men to active spiritual involvement in the church?

    a) as men?

    b) at this stage in life?

    c) in church culture?

3. What strategies have been effective for engaging young men in active discipleship?

In this chapter, the participants of the study will be introduced, and their insights concerning the study questions will be presented.

Participants

Information about the research participants and their situations in ministry is given here. Pseudonyms have been assigned for both the participants and the congregations in which they minister, to maintain confidentiality. The researcher selected six congregations, identified as good samples for the purpose of this study. From these congregations, five ministers and three young men were interviewed. From three of the congregations, only the minister was interviewed; from two congregations both the minister and a young man were interviewed; and from the final congregation only a young man was interviewed. As it happened, the young man interviewed from this sixth congregation has since moved into the Christian ministry and is presently serving as Assistant Minister in a seventh congregation. This young man was therefore able to give insights from the very successful ministry to men exercised by this seventh congregation.

The participants will be introduced below. First, the researcher will introduce the ministers in alphabetical order of their name, and second, he will introduce the young men. In the case of the ministers, these introductions will also include a brief introduction to the congregations in which they serve.

<u>Five Ministers</u>

Arthur

Arthur is minister of a PCI congregation situated in what he identifies as a large village in Northern Ireland. This village is situated within five or six miles from two small towns and two larger towns, but is also within commuter distance of the city of Belfast. For various reasons, there has been a fairly large movement of population into

the area over the past thirty years, including a large percentage of those whose denominational background is Presbyterian.

When Arthur was installed as minister about twenty years ago, the small church building in the centre of the village was already fairly full for worship, but with numbers rising under Arthur's ministry, the building was soon too small and the decision was made to build a new suite of buildings on the edge of the village. This decision was made easier by the large proportion of the congregation who had recently moved to the area and had fewer emotional ties to the old building. Since then membership has continued to rise, with attendances rising to the present figure of around five hundred.

Today, members of the church come from a wide range of social classes, with a noticeable rise in young professionals since the opening of the new facility. Since the vast majority of the congregation have joined in recent years, there is greater openness to change and development in ministry. While the message preached from the pulpit is conservative, the style of worship is contemporary. The dress-code is informal.

In addition to Arthur, the church employs a retired minister part-time for pastoral visitation, a part-time women's worker, a part-time secretary, a part-time musical director and a full-time Assistant Minister (a ministry trainee who is with the congregation for around two years). This Assistant Minister shares the preaching and is involved with the youth ministry. Formerly, the congregation employed a youth and children's worker, who took a particular interest in discipling boys. However, there were difficulties with the individual concerned, and the Assistant Minister has since taken over those responsibilities. Ministry to men is a priority for Arthur, and his congregation is marked by a high degree of involvement by men.

Jim

Jim is minister of a small PCI congregation in a working-class, mostly rental "housing estate" in a large town in Northern Ireland. The church building occupies a site specifically designated for a church by the local government housing agency when the housing was all built, in 1976. The congregation has always had an evangelical outlook and currently has an attendance of around a hundred people on Sundays. Jim has been minister here since for more than fifteen years..

This is an area of serious social deprivation, with a high concentration of unemployment, welfare dependence, disability, low academic achievement, and crime. There is also a legacy of paramilitarism left over from the Northern Ireland "troubles." However, these social problems do not affect every family, and quite a few of the residents are well-adjusted, hard-working people who are very content to live here. Because of the social problems, this area has attracted a great deal of government support, and Jim's church has been able to secure funding for two youth and community workers, one male, one female. While for a time the congregation tended to "circle the wagons" and adopt a defensive attitude towards the local community, in more recent years the church members have changed their outlook and now actively seek to engage with the community in which they are placed, reaching out with the gospel of Christ. One aspect of this outreach is a very focused ministry to unchurched men.

Matthew

Matthew is minister of another church in the centre of a low-cost housing project on the edge of a large town. Built in the early 1970s, this housing project was initially occupied mostly by nominally Presbyterian families who moved from the outlying rural

areas for work in the local factories that had recently been established in the area. The buildings comprise a multi-purpose hall used for both worship on Sundays and other activities through the week, including youth ministry. In the early years, the congregation was established quickly and flourished. However, as time went on, the character of the area changed, with increasing social problems, such as alcohol, drug misuse, family breakdown, and a rise in paramilitary activity during the Northern Ireland "troubles." These changes resulted in a tendency for stable families to relocate out of the area, including many church-goers. Consequently, attendance at church plummeted, and a defensive mentality grew, with members feeling somewhat threatened by the community around them.

When Matthew was installed as minister about ten years ago, the congregation was doctrinally sound, and the elders had a missional heart, but the congregation had little contact with the community. Attendance at worship had fallen to about ninety people, with only a few children. Since that time, Matthew has set out very deliberately to lead the congregation in building bridges back into the community, and especially building relationships with men. As a result, attendance at worship has grown to about 160, with fifty children involved. The congregation's youth group is now strong, and there is a high degree of involvement from men of various ages, including young men. Matthew's congregation has sourced funding to employ a young man studying on the Cornhill Preaching course run by the Proclamation Trust in Belfast, as an outreach worker. This appointment was for two years; a second young man has since been employed on the same basis. In this way, the church has gradually built up relationships with a growing group of young men. In recent years, a number of young men have come

to faith in Matthew's church; their conversion and their unembarrassed confession of it have made a strong impression on the community.

Noel

Noel has, for the last seven years, been minister of a strong town-centre PCI congregation in a rural town in Northern Ireland. The congregation was founded in the 1860s as a result of the "1859 Revival" which swept through the province of Ulster. Noel's two predecessors exercised outstandingly strong evangelical ministries, leaving a congregation that is well taught and includes a good number of spiritually mature men, especially among the eldership, as well as a good representation of men of various ages in its spiritual life. There is also a strong men's discipleship group and a significant ministry to young men. In terms of staff, in addition to Noel, the church has a full-time male youth worker. The Session Clerk, who has retired from secular work, and a former missionary couple are also appointed to do pastoral visitation on a part-time voluntary basis.

Wesley

Wesley is minister of a large congregation of more than five hundred families in a town on the outskirts of Belfast. The town has grown considerably in the last forty years, with people moving out from the city. Many of the present congregation commute to Belfast for work. Both of the PCI congregations in the town were traditionally known for their theologically liberal ministry, but this has changed in recent years, partly reflecting recent changes in the denomination as a whole towards a more evangelical emphasis. Many of those who have joined the Wesley's church after moving from the city have also brought an evangelical emphasis. The church has a strong men's group covering a wide range of ages, meeting weekly for Bible study and the exploration of discipleship issues.

A separate group of younger men also meets regularly in the church halls, using football as a means of building outreach to young men in the community.

<p align="center">Three Young men</p>

Colm

Colm grew up in a Roman Catholic home, initially in the housing project where Matthew's church is situated. His family moved out when he was young because the area became a "Protestant area" during the Northern Ireland "troubles." Although his family practiced Roman Catholicism, during his teen years, attendance at mass was optional for Colm and meant very little to him. When he was fifteen, Colm left home to go to London to play professional soccer on an English Premier League team. After four years, however, Colm's football career ended because the club found itself in financial difficulty. He returned home. After a temporary job in a local factory, Colm applied and was accepted as an officer in the newly re-constituted Police Service of Northern Ireland. He was married at age twenty-one and is the father of two children, now aged eleven and five. However, after a few years, Colm's marriage broke up. For a ten-year period until he was twenty-nine, Colm had never attended mass, and he doubted the existence of God. He was confirmed in this view by reading the works of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchins, and others.

Colm was converted in 2009 when a friend invited him to a service in a Pentecostal church near Belfast – a church that his new girlfriend also attended. He recounts how the exuberant worship was so very different from anything he had ever experienced, and although he felt uncomfortable that first time and could not wait to leave, he told his girlfriend that he would go again if she wanted. He met the pastor and

began to go regularly. He liked what he heard, asked lots of questions, re-read some of

the books by Dawkins and others, and started to see things differently. After several

weeks of attending this church, in August of 2009, Colm responded to the appeal after the

sermon and says he'll never forget the feeling – he felt like jumping up and down and

telling everyone he was a Christian.

A short time later, Colm attended the funeral of the mother of an old friend from

his childhood who still lived in the area where Matthew ministers. Matthew took the

funeral service. Colm liked the way Matthew preached and after the service was

introduced to him. Matthew was interested to hear Colm's story so they exchanged

emails, and as a result Colm began to attend Matthew's church. He feels more

comfortable there than in the Elim church and really appreciates Matthew's teaching

ministry. Colm attends church quite regularly and has enjoyed a small-group Bible study.

He would like to introduce his girl-friend to Matthew's church and for them both to join.

Mervyn

Mervyn grew up in the area where Jim's church is located and was introduced to

Jim's church through the youth ministry in his early teens. This ministry included both a

Saturday evening Youth Club and, on alternate weeks, a Sunday evening youth group

that had a Christian message. Mervyn wasn't interested in the message, but enjoyed the

fun and games. He never attended church services, but as an older teenager, was drawn

into a junior leadership role in the youth club. While he was resistant to the message that

the leaders taught, Mervyn was nevertheless drawn into friendship and strongly

influenced by Jim, the minister, and by the youth and community worker employed by

the church at that time. When he was eighteen, his closest friend trusted in Christ, and Mervyn saw a very clear change in his friend's life.

At this time, Mervyn began to study in Belfast, traveling up and down from home, and his involvement in church activities lessened. He believed that the Christian message just wasn't for him. Mervyn sums up his social life at the time, "I was quite into alcohol and drinking and messing about with friends." However, Mervyn still kept links with the church. By the age of twenty-two, his partying had become less frequent, and he became quite friendly with the church's new youth and community worker. As he explains, the message he had heard "just kept playing over" in his mind, and one morning he went to see his friend the youth worker to chat about the gospel. He then went home and committed his life to Christ. Since then, Mervyn has immersed himself in the life of the church, through Sunday services, small-group Bible studies, and prayer times. He has also enthusiastically involved himself in the leadership of both the youth ministry and the men's ministry.

Norman

Norman grew up in a small town in Northern Ireland and attended the local Presbyterian church with his family. As a teenager, he attended Boys' Brigade (B.B.) and other church activities. At the age of fifteen, he joined a communicants' class and was accepted into full membership of the congregation, believing himself to be a Christian. He later realized that he was not.

At the age of seventeen, Norman passed his driving test and soon began to use his new freedom to explore a social life outside of church activities. He soon altogether abandoned any faith he had previously professed. He married and found employment in

an engineering trade, doing well in his job. At around the age of twenty-six, he and his

wife spent six months living and working in Australia, but he recounts how, when he

came back, his grandmother told him that now he was back home he should start going to

church. His wife was quite keen to attend, and so they did. Three weeks later, in response

to the preaching of his minister, Norman committed his life to Christ. He was then

twenty-seven.

Norman describes himself as a "man's man," with interests in football and other

sports, as well as in cars. After his conversion, he became an enthusiastic leader in the

Boys' Brigade. He remembered the influence of the godly men who were leaders when

he was a boy, and the seeds of the gospel that had been sown in his life over those years.

He now had a passion to see "young men becoming Christ's men." In more recent years,

Norman felt a call from God to the Christian ministry. He now works as an Assistant

Minister in a very successful congregation in a large town in Northern Ireland. This

congregation has a vibrant men's ministry, which began through men-only Bible study

groups.

Summary

The information gleaned from the interviews with these participants will now be

summarized in terms of the research questions and the themes that emerged during the

interview process. First, the issues that prevent young men from active spiritual

involvement are discussed, both in terms of those that affect men in general and then

those that specifically target eighteen to thirty year-old men. Next, the issues in church

culture that were reported as putting men off are introduced. Then, issues in church life

that can attract men are discussed. Finally, the successful overall strategies that these churches have developed for reaching young men are set out.

It is important to consider, however, a correction to all of this that was offered by respondent Jim. He points out that not all men are the same, and while there are some clearly identifiable common characteristics, real men actually exhibit a wide variety of personality traits. For example, many men seldom read, but some love to read; some men are very practical, others not; many men love sports, but not all of them. It is wise to take account of both the common characteristics and the variety of personalities involved in this subject.

Issues That Tend to Prevent Young Men from Active Spiritual Involvement in the Church

Issues Affecting Men Regardless of Age

Stereotypes

Three of the five ministers interviewed spoke specifically of the importance of countering the stereotypical misconceptions that men, especially those presently outside the church, have of Christians and of the church. Jim spoke of the sense in society that "it's not a manly thing" to be interested in church – that in the Northern Ireland context, it is the women in the family who send children to church and to Sunday school. He went on to share, "There is a traditional kind of sissy association with church, which I'm guessing very few have thought about – it's just there in the atmosphere."

Matthew, Jim and Arthur also highlighted the misconception that the minister does not understand the experiences and daily lives of non-ministerial men, and that they struggle to identify with the world in which normal people live and the issues with which

they wrestle. Arthur also spoke of his concern that many men have a misconception, not just of Christian men, but of Jesus Christ himself and other men in the Bible. He takes pains in his preaching to counter the "child's picture-book image" that so readily comes to men's minds.

Jim also highlighted how the men in his housing project mostly have a preconception of church services, based on the memory of their experiences as children. They expected services to be "stuffy" and formal, with a strict dress-code and the atmosphere "of a doctor's waiting room," where nobody talks to anybody else. He has also discovered that some men are resistant to any contact with the church due to clumsy and aggressive attempts at evangelism by Christians who did not show respect by listening to their views.

Two of the three young men who participated discussed the misunderstandings they had about the Christian gospel message before they were converted. Colm had the misconception that Protestant Christians put all the emphasis on "good living" – following a man-made set of rules, rather than the gospel of grace and a personal relationship with God. Before his conversion, Mervyn thought that "you had to be very straight-laced, your life had to be in order." He therefore concluded that he wasn't good enough.

Reluctance to Articulate

Four of the respondents cited the typical reluctance of men to talk about personal matters, as a barrier both to hearing the gospel and growing in their faith. Jim has observed a general reluctance in men to talk about how they feel and to discuss deeper issues, including spiritual matters. Arthur finds that men typically don't "open up or

discuss" their emotions. Norman added, "Men don't do emotions very well and keep things guarded." Matthew also finds that in the Northern Ireland context, Christian men are not comfortable articulating the gospel or the Christian faith. He says, "You let the minister do that, and you work with your hands. You express your faith with your hands."

The Challenge of the Gospel

Another barrier to the deeper involvement of men in the church that was identified by four of the respondents has to do with aspects of the central Christian gospel message itself. Both Noel and Matthew cited issues with submission to Christ and the cost of giving things up. Matthew explained, "If Jesus is going to be Lord over your life, you will not be able to go out and get blocked, and you will not be able to go and live however you want, with whatever woman you want to live with. And that's going to be a loss." He also suggested that such things as suffering for Christ and being a fool for Christ are hardly attractive.

Wesley spoke of what he accepts as the necessary negative emphasis within the Christian message – the fact that people are sinners who fall short of God's standards and are therefore inadequate. Norman agreed, saying that men don't like the idea of being "in the wrong." He also suggested that men are put off by an unbalanced emphasis on the things that as Christians we "must not do."

Issues Affecting Younger Men

Regarding men in the eighteen to thirty age group, four of the respondents spoke of the particular difficulties of reaching this demographic. Both Noel and Matthew see these men as characterized by persistent or extended adolescence. Many young men, they suggest, take advantage of the freedom from responsibility that society gives them to do

just whatever they like. "Having a good time" becomes the most important thing in life, and this often involves misusing alcohol and being sexually promiscuous. Matthew says that for this group, "Social life is tailored towards having a good time, and…the big event in anyone's life at that age is the weekend. So church – if there is any church link at all – it's going to be very, very minor compared with the bigger picture of a very selfish…life."

Jim speaks of a "complete buy-in" even among Christian young men "to the entertainment culture." He shares, "We have men in their twenties and thirties who would think nothing of sitting up till five in the morning to play the X-box…and then can't get up in the morning. Christian men who watch DVDs and play games, but can't read the Bible every day – an attitude of 'I'll do whatever pleases me.'" Noel added that the selfish attitudes of today's young men, as well as their reluctance to commit to work and marriage is a way that the fallenness of humanity manifests itself in western culture.

Arthur, however, has observed another trend among the younger Christian men in his church. He notes that they are more willing to articulate their feelings and show affection than their parents' generation.

<div align="center">Aspects of Church Culture</div>

Three of the five ministers and all three of the young men interviewed identified certain types of songs and styles of music as being off-putting to men. Mervyn expressed this quite strongly, identifying emotion-based or feelings-based songs, that as a non-Christian man he just would not sing. Mathew is also aware of the danger of using too much music with a feminine style. However, he believes this not to be such a problem in

PCI churches where the more theological style of modern hymns, such as those penned by Keith Getty and others, are generally more popular.

However, Norman expressed the strongest sentiments on this issue, stating that the type of worship often found in churches is "very effeminate." He highlighted songs that are too "lovey-dovey," sentimental, and emotional, but felt that the problem is wider than the choice of song. When pressed, he had difficulty articulating exactly what it was that he found effeminate, suggesting a combination of factors including the instruments used, the tempo of the music, the emphasis on emotions, and even the decoration of the building.

More generally, concerning the conduct of worship, Arthur, Matthew, Jim, Norman, Mervyn, and Colm all emphasized that both an out-of-date style of music and an unnecessary formality in both the general conduct of worship and dress-code can deter young men from engaging in worship. Jim's congregation take pains to make sure Sunday worship services are not too "stuffy." Several of the respondents also highlighted preaching that does not engage with people in the real world of their everyday experience. Finally, Colm highlighted the danger of emotional manipulation in the Pentecostal church he attended with his girl-friend.

Aspects of Church Life That Tend to Attract Young Men to Active Spiritual Involvement in the Church.

Relationships with Christian Men

All three of the young men interviewed reported the influence of significant relationships with ministers and other Christian men as being very significant. Mervyn was very quick to list the three men who had a profound influence on his life, and he

highlighted the influence of a close male friend who became a Christian. Colm reported

his conversations with the ministers of the two churches he attended as significant in

drawing him to faith. Norman also cited the influence of godly Boys' Brigade officers in

his teenage years as an inspiration for his own involvement in B.B. after his conversion.

Four of the five ministers interviewed also reported that building relationships

with men was a very important key to effectively attracting them into church activities

and eventually to Christian discipleship. As men get to know real Christian men, their

stereotypical misconceptions are corrected, and they become more comfortable with

attending church activities. As these relationships are deepened, and trust is built, the

ministers interviewed have found that men's initial reluctance to "open up" and talk

about personal matters can be overcome, and in the right environment men are very

willing to discuss issues of faith.

<div align="center">Sport and Recreation</div>

All five of the ministers interviewed and two of the three young men reported the

importance of sporting and recreational activities in drawing men, especially young men,

into the life of the church, and as a means of building relationships among Christian men.

Five-as-side soccer was highlighted by five respondents, including four of the ministers.

Each of the churches in which these ministers serve organizes regular soccer nights either

on church premises or at a local facility. A wide range of other sporting and recreational

activities were reported as attractive to men, depending on the local situation. These

include club-type activities such as pool and darts or computer games, trips away for

fishing, go-carting, or golf, as well as events involving both men and women like

barbecues. Arthur's church has a group of men who own motor cycles, and they go on regular rides together.

<center>Food</center>

Arthur strongly emphasized the value of serving food at men's teaching events - and not just the sandwiches and tray-bakes that are traditional in PCI churches. His church organizes Chinese nights for new members and cooks foods such as chicken wings at men's teaching events. Matthew also referred more than once to the helpful impact of sharing a cup of tea or coffee.

<center>Practical Activities</center>

Arthur strongly made the point that men respond to a challenge and have a particular need for a sense of significance and a job to do in leading and providing. Several respondents emphasized that men have a preference for practical activity. One expression of this is the manner in which these churches use sports and recreation as a means of building relationships. Other expressions of the same practical emphasis are the appreciation men show for practical application in preaching, and in Jim's case, the willingness he has found on the part of non-Christian men contacted by his church to do practical jobs in the church building. Both Arthur and Wesley have found it helpful to involve men in overseas mission teams, especially when there is the opportunity for practical work such as building.

<center>Style of Worship and Praise</center>

Six of the eight respondents highlighted the attractiveness of a relaxed, informal style in worship services, with a good balance of strong doctrinal hymns and songs as opposed to the more sentimental, feelings-based songs that tend to deter men. Several

respondents referred to the way that the praise in church is led, suggesting that men prefer a praise band, especially involving guitars and drums, playing with a strong rhythm. In particular, the style of music in both of the evangelical churches that Colm has attended clearly made a very significant positive impression on him, contrasted with the very staid and traditional worship to which he had been accustomed in the Roman Catholic church of his youth. Several of the respondents also highlighted the attractiveness for young men of an informal dress-code.

<div align="center">Straight-forward Preaching</div>

Six of the seven respondents highlighted a certain style of preaching as attractive to men. Three of the ministers and two of the young men described this style variously as "straight-talking," "open and direct," "plain speaking and robust," or simply "direct" or "clear." All of these descriptions indicate a style that expresses the truth of scripture in a simple, straightforward manner that does not blunt the challenge and or avoid hard truths. Colm said that for men, "truth matters." Mervyn, in his working-class context, appreciates the simplicity of Jim's preaching and the conversational style he uses. Five of the respondents emphasized the importance of preaching that applies the Bible's teaching and grounds it in the real world of the congregation. Both Matthew and Noel feel that men respond positively to a challenge and appreciate frankness.

<div align="center">Strong Male Leadership</div>

Several of the respondents voiced their theological conviction that it is God's will for men and women to fulfill complementary roles in both the family and the church, with men best suited to leadership. Both Matthew and Arthur believe their experience confirms this view that when men step up to the mark, their wives show appreciation, and

the men themselves show evidence of spiritual growth and commitment. These ministers

therefore make a point of preaching directly to men as husbands and fathers, challenging

them to involvement with their children and spiritual leadership in the home. Norman

reported that in his own case, when he took a lead in attending church, his wife readily

went with him. When he committed his life to Christ, she soon renewed the commitment

she had previously made.

Arthur voiced his grave concern about the policy in the PCI to appoint both

women and men to both the eldership and to the pastorate. He believes that if too many

women are involved in the leadership of a church, then men will be discouraged from

involvement. Likewise, Noel believes that the good balance that exists in his

congregation between men and women in the spiritual heart of the congregation is

strongly influenced by the tradition of male involvement. He is thankful for the number

of spiritually mature men, including among the eldership, who provide strong role models

for the younger men. Martin especially emphasized the powerful effect of the witness of

men from his community whose lives have been changed by the gospel.

<u>Men-only Bible Study</u>

Despite men's natural reluctance to articulate as introduced above, in the right

circumstances where mutual trust has been built and a non-threatening context is

established, none of the respondents reported any difficulty in encouraging men to

engage in small-group Bible study. This is especially true when the study occurs in the

context of men-only groups where men can share with other men. Arthur referred to

issues that are important for men to face, especially in the area of sexual temptation,

which they are much happier to discuss with other men, rather than when their wives are present.

Wesley reported the characteristic thick-skinned, sharp humor and "rough and tumble" atmosphere of his men's fellowship group, which allows men to express themselves in an unembarrassed way. Arthur also found that when he first started men's Bible study or discipleship groups, he struggled to encourage the men to participate, but when he persisted, the barriers gradually came down, and rich and powerful times of learning and sharing together ensued.

Strategies That have Been Effective for Engaging Young Men in Active Discipleship

<u>Priority Given to Men's Ministry</u>

Arthur, Matthew, Jim and Noel all emphasized their deliberate policy of targeting men, because of their conviction that men have a strategic importance and influence in their families and in society. Both Matthew and Jim have seen that conviction confirmed in practice, since when a man is converted or starts to come to church, he nearly always brings his wife/partner and children with him. Matthew made the point that in his community, when a woman starts to come to church it is not seen as surprising, but when a young "cool" man is converted and articulates his faith, everyone takes notice.

<u>Building Relationships</u>

Four of the ministers highlighted the priority they gave to spending time with men and so building relationships with them. These ministers reported the many benefits of this emphasis. The most obvious of these are the correcting of stereotypical misconceptions and the building of trust and confidence, which in turn have been the key to engaging men in meaningful conversation about the Christian gospel message.

Matthew spoke of the "many, many hours" he had spent with men, especially young men. He described this as an "inordinate" amount of time and explained how he had delegated other pastoral work, for example among the elderly, to others, so he could concentrate on the men.

Matthew has made it a priority to spend time with the people who live in the area, visiting the local school, the soccer club, the boxing club, and the flute band, and taking every opportunity to build relationships with men. He has also sought to get to know leaders of the paramilitary organizations that still exist in the area. These men tend to wield quite an influence. He has found that the contacts made in this way often open doors, for example, for him to conduct weddings. By doing this, he not only gets an opportunity to interact with more men, but also, as in the example of a wedding, to preach the gospel of God's grace to a congregation who normally have no opportunity to hear it and no contact with the church.

Arthur discussed this with particular reference to himself as a minister. He suggested that ministers are often regarded as quite odd – "He dresses funny, he uses funny language, he changes his voice every time he starts to pray…." Arthur therefore deliberately engages with men attending church for the first time to contradict any misconceptions. He says, "…when a family comes to visit, I will make a bee-line, not for the children and certainly not for the wife, but for the man – I will look him in the eye, I will engage him, I will talk to him. I will try to build up a trust and a relationship immediately the first time I meet him." He continues, "I don't want him to think that this is a sort of soft, poofy kind of guy – a wimp."

Matthew has also used his own interest and participation in sport as a bridge into young men's lives, organizing trips to soccer and rugby matches, as well as opportunities for men to participate in surfing, which is a particular interest of his. Jim spoke of the patient work that he, his youth workers, and the church's voluntary leaders have done in slowly building relationships and so building trust. He summed up his approach as "lengthy engagement with people." Likewise, Noel remarked on the amount of time both he and his youth worker spend with young men, with his youth worker often discipling them on a one-to-one or small-group basis.

Arthur also spoke of very deliberately "working hard at relationships" with young men. Arthur has found great inspiration from the writings of Paul Tripp[168] and his emphasis on the sequence "know - love - speak - do." He believes that when men get know him and his other leaders, and they see that these men love them, then they are much more likely to listen to the gospel message and, by God's grace, respond in faith and obedience.

In his men's ministry, Wesley is impressed by the depth of fellowship that has developed. On the surface, the men are full of sharp, even abrasive wit, but when trouble or illness occurs, a deep, caring love is revealed in many practical ways. Norman has witnessed a similar depth of practical care in the men's group at his present church.

A "Young-Male-friendly" Worship Style

Three of the ministers highlighted a relaxed and "non-stuffy" style of worship as part of their strategy for attracting young men. This removes barriers, puts men at their ease, and addresses negative misconceptions. These ministers encourage a relaxed dress

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[168] Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, ed. Susan Lutz, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002).

code for the congregation and avoid clerical dress for themselves. Matthew spoke of "…removing as many barriers as we can. So we have a cup of tea, and we are very relaxed, and the music's reasonably mainstream, and people are welcomed." All three of the young men appreciate the informal style of the churches that they have experienced.

In terms of the choice of praise, both Matthew and Arthur avoid what Matthew referred to as "gloopy, emotional songs of love," and both deliberately involve men in the leading of worship. While they find women are often more willing to lead the singing, men are willing to be involved in playing instruments in a praise band, as well as leading from the front in other ways. Arthur reported that he avoids songs that are too subjective and is constantly looking for contemporary tunes and musical settings for some of the older, solidly theological hymns.

<u>Preaching</u>

In his preaching, Matthew has sought to be open about his own sins and preach in a style that is relevant to the real lives of the real people in the congregation – and indeed those not yet part of the congregation. He preaches in a very straight-talking, challenging manner that he believes men appreciate, deliberately drawing on what he sees as the competitive and heroic instincts of men, encouraging them to rise to the challenge of discipleship, despite the cost. He emphasizes the very manly images in scripture of Christians as soldiers and athletes, willing to pay the price of short-term sacrifices for the satisfaction of longer-term gain.

Both Matthew and Arthur regularly challenge the Christian men in their congregations to "step up to the mark" in their responsibilities as husbands and fathers and as leaders in the church. Arthur often makes a point of addressing men directly in his

sermons. In order to counter the "child's picture-book image" that men may have of Jesus and other biblical characters, Arthur is always careful to highlight the real world "nitty-gritty" reality of biblical stories so as to show the relevance of these stories in the real lives of real men today. For example, he highlights the real physical dangers from wild animals that David faced as a shepherd-boy and the sexual temptation that Joseph faced in the house of Potiphar.

<u>Church Staff</u>

Another feature of these churches which have successfully reached men and drawn men into the heart of their congregation is that in most cases, they have access to church staff, other than the minister, whom they have assigned to ministry among men. This highlights the intensive nature of the emphasis they have put on this ministry and the strategy of slowly building relationships, both one-to-one and through small group discipleship. These staff members include Arthur's former Youth Worker and present Assistant Minister, Noel's Youth Worker, Matthew's Cornhill Ministry trainees, and Jim's male Youth and Community Worker.

<u>Men's Groups</u>

The ministry to men in each of these successful congregations has taken a variety of forms, depending on the local situation and the required emphasis, whether to reach non-churched men in the community or to engage with existing or new church members. A variety of different types of men's groups have been formed, often with multiple types of men's ministries in the same congregation. However, in general, two distinct types of groups are found in these churches – those that centre on sports and recreational activities and those that centre on Bible study and discipleship.

Recreational Groups or Activities

The men's ministry in Jim's church is particularly interesting and instructive. When the congregation's leadership first began to reach out to the community around them, and to men in particular, their initial emphasis was to consider how they might adjust their approach to worship in order make church services more accessible to unchurched people. However, when their attempts had little success, they realized they would need a more fundamental approach. Over the last two or three years, therefore, the congregation has been on going out into the streets of the estate to meet people where they are, in order to build relationships with them. A particular effort has been made to contact men in this way.

In time, the men contacted have been invited to activities on the church premises, such as pool, darts, and especially soccer, either four to five a side in the church hall or on the grass area beside the building. This has resulted in a regular men's group which meets to play soccer every other week and enjoy a "club" night on the weeks in between. Trips away from the estate for other activities, especially angling, have also been helpful in building relationships. Initially, the emphasis in all of this was very purposefully not direct evangelism, but winning the men's confidence, trusting that opportunities for witness would arise naturally.

Having won the men's trust, then, and with their agreement, various opportunities have been provided for them to find out more about the Christian faith. This has involved the sharing of Christian testimony and a number of very successful question-and-answer evenings. A number of the men have begun to attend worship, bringing their wives/partners and children with them, and a small number have professed faith. At the

time of Jim's interview, the next stage in this process of engagement that the church was planning was to offer the men the opportunity to enroll on a "Christianity Explored" course.

When his part-time worker was first appointed, Matthew encouraged him to target teenage boys from the area, building relationships through soccer and social activities. Gradually, as he built trust, the boys brought their friends, and the group has grown. As these boys have grown into young men, some have trusted in Christ, been discipled, and integrated into the life of the congregation.

In his rather different situation, Arthur has used sports, especially football, to draw men into fellowship within his congregation. From the start of his ministry, the church has organized regular soccer evenings for young men at the leisure centre in a neighboring town. There is also a group of "bikers" (motorcyclists) in his congregation, who regularly go for runs.

In a similar way, some of the leaders in Mervyn's church have seen the potential of inviting young men to play football in their hall, as a means to building relationships and drawing these men deeper into the life of the congregation. To date, however, the results have not been so encouraging. Mervyn also highlighted the enthusiasm of men for other social events that his church organizes, mostly during the summer months for both men and women of all ages. These include barbecues and cycle runs that often involve men from outside the church membership. Mervyn says "men love to be out of doors, - at a barbecue and so on....A lot of men will come who wouldn't be comfortable in the church, but they love being out here."

Arthur's church has also run an eighteen to thirties group for couples, organizing social events with food and relaxed activities to build up relationships, welcome new couples, and connect these younger adults to those of a similar age in the congregation. In Noel's church, recreational events are organized on an occasional and often informal basis, involving golf days, go-carting, and men's breakfasts with an inspirational speaker.

Both Mervyn and Norman related how their experience of youth ministry in their teenage years influenced their eventual response to the gospel. Not only were the seeds of the gospel sown through the teaching they received, but their relationships with godly youth leaders reinforced the message and made it attractive. In both cases, it seems that when God's time was right, and when they were at the right stage in their growth into mature adulthood, commitment to Christ, while it involved a very significant change in lifestyle and outlook, was a surprisingly simple and almost natural response to make. The relationships already established also made their transition into the heart of congregational life very easy.

Men's Discipleship and Bible Study Groups

The men's ministry in Wesley's church was not actually started as a deliberate strategy by the church leadership, but grew out of a number of trips that a team of men made for practical mission and charitable work in Ethiopia. While the original leader, a man with a strong personality and a very hospitable nature, is no longer involved, the bonds of fellowship forged through these trips resulted in a group of men spanning a broad age-range, who meet weekly for Bible study and prayer using a variety of published material. Wesley characterizes the group as having a very masculine rough-and-tumble ethos and sharp robust wit, which is relished by those who belong. In the

discussion and in practice, there is a strong emphasis on practical application. The group is characterized by an aversion to agendas and planned programs. Rather, the men embrace a spontaneity of approach that he personally finds frustrating, but it works very well for the group. These men also show a high degree of practical love and care for each other and for the needy in society.

Apart from Wesley, all of the other four ministers have used men-only small groups of various kinds and found them helpful. All three of the young men have also found such groups helpful. Both Matthew and Arthur regularly use the evangelistic course Christianity Explored,[169] which is designed to cover the basics of the Christian faith and to be accessible for those with no Christian background. Matthew and his youth workers have used this course for groups of men of various sizes and even one-to-one. He regularly offers it to men with whom he has made contact and is getting to know. He has also used the follow-up course Discipleship Explored for those who have come to faith. Wesley's men's group has also used these courses.

Both Arthur's church and the church where Norman now serves have men-only small groups as part of their wider congregational small-group program. Matthew hopes to develop small groups and intends to include men-only groups within the overall structure. Arthur has found that men are much more willing to discuss their heart issues in the context of a men-only group, where their wives are not present. These issues obviously include, but are not limited to, the struggles men have with sexual temptation and their role as husbands and fathers.

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[169] Rico Tice, Barry Cooper, and Craig Dyer, *Christianity Explored* (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2011), DVD, Leaders' Guide, Participants' Guide.

Arthur's church also has separate regular evenings of teaching for men and women as part of their midweek Bible teaching program. During the men's meetings, they enjoy food and fellowship and receive teaching on a variety of issues. Another strategy adopted by both Arthur and Noel is a discipleship group for young men who are potential future leaders. In both cases, the men were selected by the minister, and the emphasis has been both on discipleship issues and building relationships with the minister and with each other. Arthur has found this process enormously helpful, with young men developing into leadership in the congregation and beyond. The group in Noel's church has "taken on a life of its own" and continued after the period that was initially envisaged. It has been opened up to others and is now led by the congregation's youth worker, who grew up in the congregation and was already part of the group.

<div align="center">**Summary of Findings**</div>

This research has investigated how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have been successful in engaging with men in the age range eighteen to thirty, drawing them from the periphery of congregational life or beyond to active spiritual involvement in the life of their local church. The results show a variety of approaches among these churches, depending on their local circumstances, but also a number of common themes.

In order to dispel the frequent misconceptions held by men about the Christian faith and to create opportunities to share the gospel message, most of these churches have emphasized the importance of building relationships with young men, mainly using sport and recreation to this end. When relationships were built and trust began to develop, the characteristic reticence often displayed by men to talk about matters of faith was

overcome. In this context, men will often enjoy informal groups to explore issues of faith and discipleship and to study the Bible. In particular, it has been found that men prefer to discuss matters of personal discipleship in a male-only context.

These successful churches have also given thought to their style of worship, emphasizing informality in dress-code and in the conduct of services, choosing hymns and songs that avoid overly sentimental and emotional lyrics and music. In both their preaching and the choice of songs, these churches emphasize a robust presentation of biblical truth, strong challenge, and practical application.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

Throughout the western world, surveys show that more women attend church than men. In congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, while the disparity between men and women attending church is less severe, the men who attend are rather less likely to be involved at the spiritual heart of the congregation's life. Furthermore, as young adults in the eighteen to thirty age range tend to be the least represented age group in the life of congregations, the absence of eighteen to thirty year-old men is of great concern.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider how congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have helped men in the age group eighteen to thirty, who are on the periphery of congregational life, become actively involved in the spiritual life of their local church.

Three research questions were framed to guide the study. These were:

1. What issues tend to prevent men, ages eighteen to thirty, from active spiritual involvement in the church?

    a) as men?

    b) at this stage in life?

    c) in church culture?

2. What aspects of church life tend to attract these men to active spiritual involvement in the church?

   a) as men?

   b) at this stage in life?

   c) in church culture?

3. What strategies have been effective for engaging young men in active discipleship?

<u>Literature Research</u>

Literature research was undertaken in several areas. First, on the subject of masculinity, available literature was reviewed in the areas of both sociology and psychology, with a focus on masculine characteristics, as well as on where those characteristics originate. Biblical teaching was also reviewed. Although there is lively debate in the literature, the conclusion drawn from secular research is that a fairly constant set of male personality traits exist across cultures, and that these characteristics result partly from genetic inheritance and partly from socialization as boys grow into men. There is also, however, a great deal of variability in personality traits among men – as there is among women. This conclusion was found to be in general agreement with the consistent witness of the Bible, from the creation accounts in Genesis through to the later New Testament documents, that while men and women are equal in value and dignity, they are created to have different, but complementary roles. The distinct role assigned in the Bible to men can be summarized as one of leadership in marriage, in family life, and in the church family.

A second general area of literature research was in the distinct developmental characteristics of men in the targeted age-range. This research revealed a relatively new stage in human development encompassing this demographic, due to recent changes in society. These "emerging adult" young people are no longer adolescents, but they are not yet adults, and they have particular characteristics that must be taken into account by churches seeking to work with them.

Popular Christian publishing on the subject of ministry to men was surveyed, and a number of examples were considered in detail. This revealed both strengths and weaknesses in this body of literature, generally correlating with how faithful the authors are to both biblical teaching and scientific research. While a certain caution is necessary, helpful ideas and approaches can be found in this literature.

Practical Research

Having surveyed the literature, practical research was undertaken using a qualitative model. Six churches were identified as having been successful in reaching men, especially men in the age-range of eighteen to thirty years old. From these, five ministers and three young men were interviewed to learn from their experience. These interviews were analyzed and lessons drawn. While a variety of approaches in ministry to men was discovered, suited to the individual circumstances of each church, a number of common themes emerged among these successful churches as well as strategies that may be used by other churches in PCI, applying them to their own particular circumstances. These strategies included a strong emphasis on building relationships with young men, especially through sporting and other recreational activities, leading to involvement of young men in male-only groups to explore the Christian faith, for Bible study and

discipleship. Strategies were also described for making worship and preaching more accessible to young men.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the literature and research will interact in order to identify practical findings that churches in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can use in their ministry to men.

Barriers to the Involvement of Men

The research has identified four particular barriers to attracting young men to active engagement at the spiritual centre of church life. The first of these concerns the misconceptions of the Christian gospel, the Christian life and Christ's church, which are common in Northern Ireland society. Christianity and religious matters in general are seen, even by church-going men, as more of a feminine than a masculine interest. Jim, one of the ministers interviewed for this study, noted that "There is a traditional kind of sissy association with church, which I'm guessing very few have thought about – it's just there in the atmosphere." A significant factor in these misconceptions may be the stereotypical portrayal of Christians, and especially clergymen, in the media. Christians in television drama productions are most often portrayed as gentle old ladies, or as legalistic, hypocritical men, and clergym

en are stereotypically rather soft, harmless, and effeminate.

The second barrier to the greater involvement of men at the centre of church life is the perception that church culture, and in particular worship services, are more suited to the personalities of women rather than men, and to older people rather than young adults. This can mean the use of too many songs that are overly emotional or sentimental,

sermons that make people feel good but don't challenge them, an unnecessary formality in dress, a stuffiness in how services are led, or a style of music that is perceived as old-fashioned or too "soft." Of course, it may be that the lack of involvement of men in church life is self-perpetuating in the sense that if it is mostly women who are present and actively engaged in church activities, then the style of services and music will inevitably reflect the tastes and preferences of those women. If children grow up in families where it mostly their mother who is interested in spiritual matters and who takes the lead in teaching the Christian faith to the children, then those children will most likely live out the same roles as they grow to adulthood. If a boy looks around in church and sees none of the men singing during the praise, he will take his cue and likewise refrain from singing.

The third barrier to deeper spiritual discipleship among men has been identified by the research as a reticence among men to talk about personal matters, to express their feelings and emotions, and to discuss issues of faith. This can make men reluctant to be involved in some of the more spiritual church activities, such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and witness.

Finally, the fourth barrier to the involvement of young men in this age range is the particular characteristics of the present generation of young men in this demographic. Three of the five ministers, as well as one of the young men in the study, who is now in his late thirties, voiced some frustration with what they interpreted as an immaturity and self-centeredness in the younger men with whom they were working. For example, modern trends in sexual behavior enable young men to behave in a very irresponsible manner towards the women in their lives. These same ministers also expressed frustration

that Christian young men were immature, showing evidence of persistent or extended

adolescence.

Having introduced these barriers encountered by the respondents to the greater

involvement of young men at the spiritual heart of church life, some of the results of the

literature search will now be highlighted to shine light onto these barriers. In particular,

the common characteristics of men as discussed in the literature will be discussed, both

the characteristics of men and general and the particular characteristics of younger,

emerging adult men.

Characteristics of Men in General

While bearing in mind the great variability that exists among men, the

characteristic personality traits that have been identified include the following:

assertiveness, often expressed as a desire for success and status, and in such traits as

toughness, confidence, and self-reliance; a respect for competence; aggression; an

appetite for excitement-seeking, leading to "daring" or risk-taking behavior; restrictive

emotionality and an aversion to anything feminine, (and indeed to anything in other men

perceived as feminine, as in homosexual behavior). In contrast, women tend to be more

relationally and emotionally focused.

In terms of the previously discussed barriers to men's greater involvement in

church life, the most obviously relevant of these characteristics of masculinity is surely

the typical male aversion to anything perceived as feminine. If church is perceived as

more feminine than masculine, then men will not want to be involved there. Likewise, the

greater the extent to which the more spiritual aspects of church life, such as Bible study,

prayer, fellowship, and witness are perceived as feminine, the fewer men will be involved, and the perception will be perpetuated.

It is therefore vital that misconceptions are corrected and that men's experience with church and with Christians does not confirm, but rather contradicts these stereotypes. Men on the periphery of church life must meet and get to know spiritual men who model a "manly" Christian life and witness. And in terms of church culture and worship, anything that a congregation can do, not only to provide a gender-neutral environment, but even to err on the side of making services and other activities more comfortable for men will help to redress the imbalance that exists. Also, it will be helpful to provide specific, strongly male-orientated activities that can be publicized in the context of worship in order to correct negative impressions. These things, are of course, exactly what the successful churches in this study have sought to do.

A second general characteristic of men that bears on this research is what has been referred to as a restrictive emotionality. Men typically fear expressing their feelings and struggle to express basic emotions. This is confirmed by the interviews, and it goes some way to explaining the third barrier identified by the respondents and listed above, that men are reluctant to talk about personal matters, including matters of faith. When ministerial interviewee Wesley says, "Men don't do feelings," he does not mean that men don't have feelings or emotions, but that men have difficulty articulating those feelings, and are therefore reticent about doing so.

Other factors relating to this reticence may be found in some of the other typical male characteristics, especially men's instinct to be tough, confident, and self-reliant. If a man feels a need to be tough and strong, he will put a high value on staying composed

and in control, and he will be reluctant to reveal any possible weakness or vulnerability in his personal life. He will be afraid to expose his inner private thoughts and struggles for fear that others will see him as weak and inadequate, and lose confidence in him. In spiritual terms, this may mean that men will find it harder than women to face the reality of sin in their lives, which is exactly what Wesley reported, "…men have self-assurance, self-reliance – they don't want to be told they're sinners or they've fallen short or anything like that."

There is, of course, a gospel answer to this in the concept that, while we all are indeed weak and inadequate, God is not weak, but strong and powerful. When we are united with him in Christ, we are made strong by his power working in us. The gospel of Christ not only challenges the desire of men to be self-reliant, but replaces this self-reliance with a reliance on God. Moreover, as we rely on God and align our ambitions with his purposes, we become strong in him, and he will enable us to be tough in adversity and achieve a success that is far more significant and lasting than any merely human achievement. The picture of Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall of Man comes to mind – Adam, under God's authority, but given authority, first in his relationship with Eve, and then over all the rest of creation. Adam found great fulfillment in serving God by ruling for him.

In the context of this theological background, the results of the study have shown that men's typical reluctance to articulate their feelings can be overcome in the context of trusting relationships with other men. Where Christian men are willing to model openness about their own weaknesses and failings, and yet give testimony to the grace of God in Christ, doors have been opened for other men to begin to show a similar honesty.

As these men have had the opportunity to get to know Christian men and see the genuineness of their faith and witness, trust has grown, and these men have been found not only willing, but actually keen to "open up," admit their own weaknesses, acknowledge their sin, and find forgiveness in Christ. This has been done in one-to-one conversation, in small Bible study and discipleship groups, and in the context of worship services and larger meetings for men. It is vitally important that these gospel truths are communicated to men (and women) at every opportunity through the preaching and teaching ministry of the church.

Another reason why some men may be unwilling to talk about matters of faith is the perception that Christian discipleship is a predominantly bookish activity. Many men in Northern Ireland, especially those who have grown up in a rural or inner-city environment, have been given the impression that reading and books are for girls, while boys are supposed to concentrate on practical skills. Therefore, if Christian teaching makes biblical doctrine seem complicated and difficult to grasp, many men, especially those who have failed at school, will avoid it for that reason. Preaching must be clear and simple, and it should be applied to the practical everyday issues of men's lives.

Characteristics of Young Men Aged Eighteen to Thirty

The ministers interviewed in this research all work with men in this age-group, and most have known significant success in this endeavor. During the interviews, these ministers also showed some understanding of the issues highlighted in the literature concerning emerging adulthood as a significant stage in human development. However, most of the respondents were not aware of the literature on this issue and tended to view

the characteristic features of emerging adulthood in simplistic and generally negative terms.

It may be that the phenomenon of emerging adulthood as documented in the United States for some years has much more recently emerged in Northern Ireland and is only now beginning to be recognized. However, the trend will surely continue, and PCI ministers need to be aware of the characteristics of this stage of life in order to reach young men for Christ and help them negotiate the challenges they face. Ministers and other church workers and leaders must do everything they can to understand the young men they are seeking to help by reading relevant texts and most importantly by getting to know and listening to the young men themselves.

No doubt there is some merit in Mark Driscoll's approach,[170] mentioned by respondent Noel, which challenges young Christian men to get married and commit to adult life, but this approach can clearly be too simplistic, at least when dealing with men on the fringe or outside congregational life. Ministers and other church leaders must certainly challenge what is ungodly and unhelpful in these young men's lives, but they also need to support them and give them space to develop their identity, explore possibilities, and grow in maturity toward adulthood. In the most practical terms, this will surely mean keeping in touch with young people as they come and go to and from attendance and active participation, and not allowing them to "fall off the radar."

In particular, ministers and others must exercise patience with these young men as they consider their religious commitments and explore different possibilities. Rather than pressuring these young people to commit, leaders must be willing to exercise great

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[170] For example a sermon on masculinity found at www.marshillchurch.com/media/proverbs/men-and-masculinity.

patience in the hope that by God's grace and in his timing, many of these young people will come to a mature Christian faith and commitment, a commitment that will be even stronger for being tested during these years.

Church leaders can be encouraged by the findings of Smith and Snell regarding the positive role that parents and other adults, such as youth leaders and mentors, can have in the lives of young adults.[171] One of the potentially positive results of emerging adulthood has been the growing willingness of young Christians to take "gap years" to spend time exploring the opportunities for overseas mission work or voluntary service in congregations. Various overseas mission agencies facilitate these opportunities, and the PCI operates a "Volunteers and Interns Program" (VIP) to provide opportunities for youth work in congregations. Such opportunities can be enormously helpful in exposing young people to the needs of mission, both overseas and at home, enabling them to explore their gifts and calling and to develop their own faith and discipleship. Indeed, such experiences can be life-changing.

However, in their preaching and teaching ministry, churches must also take heed of the warning in Smith and Snell's book regarding the relativism and pluralism that pervade post-modern society, as well as the issues of identity and value that the book raises. Preachers must be willing to widen the compass of their teaching to take in these bigger, deeper issues and show to their congregations how the larger vision of the Christian worldview makes far better sense and gives far better answers to the big questions with which our society wrestles, than the rationalistic materialism that is almost universally assumed in the media and that is so influential in the lives of emerging adults.

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[171] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 283-284.

In short, we must help both young and older people see the reality and truthfulness of the Christian gospel.

<div align="center">Attractive Aspects of the Christian Faith</div>

Having discussed the barriers to church involvement in the light of the typical characteristics of men as revealed in the literature, we now consider some aspects of masculinity that can encourage men towards greater involvement in church and Christian discipleship. Despite the misconception that Christians are preoccupied with being "nice" to one-another, the reality is, of course, very different. The Christian gospel is full of challenge, and the Christian life of faith is not for the risk-averse. Indeed, the Christian view of the world is often portrayed in scripture as a war, with dangerous spiritual battles constantly being fought. Christians are portrayed, for example in Ephesians 6, as soldiers who need to be spiritually tough and competent in the use of the spiritual weapons of the Bible and prayer.

Christians are also portrayed as hard-working farmers,[172] and as athletes in a marathon race who leave aside everything that might keep them back from winning the race.[173] Almost universally in scripture, it is men rather than women who lead in national life, in battle, in commerce, and in community and family life. Men are exhorted to be strong and very courageous[174] to contend for the truth,[175] to stand up to pressure[176] and persecution,[177] to step out in faith trusting God for the consequences, and to risk everything on the bare command of God. Indeed many examples are given of men (and

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[172] 2 Timothy 2:6.
[173] Hebrews 12:1.
[174] Eg. Joshua 1:6,7,9.
[175] Jude 1:3.
[176] Ephesians 6:10.
[177] Hebrews 12:3.

women) who not only risked by lost their lives in the cause of Christ, especially in Hebrews 11. And of course, in the historical context in which the New Testament documents were written, with persecution by Jews and increasingly by the Roman authorities, these exhortations were more than theoretical. Of course, the application of all this fighting and competing to today's world does involve a shift from the physical to the spiritual, but the challenge for preachers is to demonstrate that the spiritual battle is every bit as real, if not more real, than a physical one, that it is every bit as challenging and strategic, indeed far more strategic, since it is eternal.

<div align="center">Priority of Ministry to Men</div>

If the role assigned to men by God as revealed in the Bible is taken seriously, then the priority of addressing the issue of the absence of men from the spiritual heart of congregations is a very important one, which needs to be given a high priority by congregations. If anything, prioritizing ministry to men is the most important strategy of all, since it sets the tone for everything else. If men are to be appointed to be leaders in a congregation, then they need to be ready for the task, spiritually mature and involved in the spiritual heart of the congregation. If men are to mature spiritually, then they must be discipled. Yet, before they can be discipled, they must be converted by hearing the gospel of Christ in a way they understand and in a context where they are willing to listen.

This priority is recognized and put into practice by the congregations chosen for this research. The ministers of these congregations have made men a particular focus of their practice of ministry. One minister, Matthew, assigned some of his pastoral work to others, so he could concentrate on building relationships with men. In addition, both he

and several others have recruited young men as staff members specifically for this

purpose.

<center>Relationships</center>

If there is one thing that stands out in this research, both from the data provided

by the interviews and from the literature, it is the strategic importance of the slow,

patient, time-consuming work of building relationships with young men. In the Bible,

while the communication of a particular message with specific content has always been

essential to the propagation of the Christian faith, that message has always been most

effectively communicated in the context of relationship. The Old Testament prophets

from Moses to Elijah to Ezekial often communicated the message they brought from God

as much through their lives as they did by verbally delivering the message itself.

The same is also true in the New Testament, especially in the life of Jesus, who

not only taught the people, but also drew attention to his own person by miraculous signs

and demonstrated the character of his mission by the way he interacted with people. Jesus

showed compassion to the needy, amazing and costly mercy to sinners, and grace to his

enemies, even in the context of stern words of warning. This pattern continued in the

lives of Jesus' apostles, especially in the ministry of the apostle Paul, who cared for his

converts like a father to his own children.[178] In the church, the early Christians under the

leadership of the apostles lived out the message they believed by sharing their material

goods with the needy[179] and caring for widows.[180] So today, God calls his people not only

to speak the truth of the gospel, but also to live out the grace of God in their everyday

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[178] 2 Timothy 2:12.
[179] Acts 2:44-45.
[180] Acts 6:1f.

lives, in their relationships to one another and towards those who are as yet on the periphery or outside the church.

All of this confirms the approach adopted by the successful churches studied in the research. These ministers and other church leaders put a high value on building relationship with men, all the more because men are reluctant to talk about personal matters and so do not easily form deep relationships with other men. Not only do these relationships help to dispel misconceptions, but as men on the periphery get opportunity to meet and get to know real "manly," spiritually mature, and committed Christian men, they get the opportunity to see the gospel and the Christian life modeled in the lives of men, who in all other respects are just like themselves. In this way, a context is created, within which men will be willing to listen and hear the message, ask questions, consider it, and see it lived out in the lives of other men.

This is even more powerful in these congregations since the approaches toward building relationships most often chosen, that of sport, recreational activities, and practical work, tend to build relationships as a bi-product of other activities, which makes this a less threatening way to reach those men, who tend to bond more easily "side-by-side" than "face-to-face." The activities themselves are also very specifically male-interest more than female-interest activities, which makes them more comfortable and less threatening for men. These activities are often competitive and exciting, involve challenge and strenuous effort, and require competence and positive aggression.

The ministers involved have found that as relationships are slowly built over time, sufficient trust can be established so that men are not only willing to "open up" to reveal something of their hearts, but they are glad to do so, in the context of trusting and non-

judgmental relationships. The inherent tension that men feel about revealing their personal lives may explain the "rough-and-tumble ethos and sharp robust wit" that Wesley reports in his men's group. An illusion of toughness and aggression is maintained when, of course, everyone knows that it is an illusion, whereas underneath is a very caring and loving fellowship.

<div align="center">Men's Groups for Exploring the Faith, Discipleship and Bible Study</div>

All of the churches in the study use men's groups of one kind or another in their ministry to men. However, these men's groups take a wide variety of forms, depending on the nature of the congregation, its situation, and the needs at a particular time. In Jim's church, men meet on a weekly basis, either for five-a-side soccer or for a "club night" in the church hall with pool, darts, and similar activities. He has used this program to introduce the gospel message in a very simple, non-threatening way. As trust has been built and with the men's permission, various items have been added to the weekly program, including Christian testimony and two very successful question and answer evenings.

Jim believes the key to the success of the group is the way he and his church leaders have slowly built relationships with the men, earning their trust, listening to and respecting their opinions, and they have only introduced spiritual topics with the men's permission and in response to their interest. Jim plans that the next stage in this process will involve the evangelistic course, Christianity Explored. Although this project in Jim's church still has some years to run, in terms of drawing men to mature Christian discipleship, it has already proved its worth in reaching what is a notoriously difficult group of men – largely uneducated, unchurched men in a socially deprived area.

Matthew's church, in a similar low-cost housing project, has never had a regular recreational men's group, but Matthew has involved men in a variety of different sporting and recreational activities, and he has also made a point of meeting men at the recreational activities in which they are already involved, like the local marching band. Working mainly with unchurched men, he has then invited men to a Christianity Explored course (seven to eight weeks), or to study the Bible either on a one-to-one or small-group basis. Although some, at least, of Matthew's success probably derives from his own very out-going, "manly" personality, there is much in his approach that can be instructive for others. This includes his commitment to walking along-side men in the community and finding creative ways to connect and build relationships.

Arthur's church has sought to integrate at least nominally Christian young men through regular soccer nights and by inviting young adult men and women to various social events and small-group Bible studies, some of these on a men-only basis. He has run teaching sessions specifically for men on a regular, but not so frequent basis (bi-monthly) as part of his mid-week teaching program. Arthur finds that food is a vital social catalyst on all these occasions. His very focused concentration on men has proven invaluable in making men feel welcome and helping them to integrate into this church family.

Both Arthur and Noel have run discipleship groups, by invitation, for young Christian men who show potential, with the specific intention of growing future leaders. These groups have been among the most helpful found in this study, with ministers finding opportunity to pass on some of their own vision and passion for Christ and his church.

In order to facilitate all this interaction with young men in small group and one-to-one settings, several of the churches involved in this study have appointed and employed young men to devote both quality and quantity time to ministry to teen-age boys and young men.

<div align="center">Worship</div>

The churches in this study have each made a focused effort to make worship services accessible to men, and to young men in particular. Nearly all the ministers have very deliberately sought to cultivate a relaxed style, to encourage informal dress, to employ a mostly contemporary musical style, and to avoid songs and hymns that are overly emotional or sentimental. However, it is somewhat difficult to define what makes a particular style of worship or atmosphere in a church "effeminate." This is an aspect of church life that is much discussed in popular Christian literature,[181] but while certainly highlighted by the respondents in this research, it was raised as a major issue only by one of the young men.

It may be that if ministers and others bear this issue in mind when preparing and leading worship services, and if efforts are made to ensure that a good balance of men and women are involved in leading worship – choosing songs and hymns, leading the singing, and accompanying the praise – then the "atmosphere" will reflect the sensibilities of those involved. The choice of musical style is, of course, a notoriously contentious issue in churches, mainly because musical preferences can be so individual. It may simply be that a guitar-based praise band and a good balance of up-tempo and more reflective songs will make the style of music accessible to men.

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[181] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church.*

<u>Preaching and Teaching</u>

Clearly, one of the most important aspects of worship is preaching and teaching. Ministers have an ideal opportunity to fashion the style of their preaching to be accessible to young men, speaking in a way that addresses these young men's needs and challenges them to respond. Nearly all the respondents in this study spoke of the straight-forward, direct "tell-it-like-it-is" style that appeals to men, a style that does not blunt the sharp challenge of the gospel, nor water down what are, in the end, the stark black and white implications of our response to the gospel in terms of heaven or hell. Respondents also commented on the helpfulness of a relaxed conversational style, the careful use of humor, and the importance of simple language and plenty of down-to-earth relevant illustrations.

In relating the text of scripture, ministers must counter any unbiblical child's-picture-book misconceptions of Jesus or other biblical characters. The Bible constantly pictures Jesus as a well-rounded "manly" man, welcoming children and gentle and compassionate where appropriate, but also fearless in confronting his enemies, using humor where appropriate,[182] graphic in warning of the dangers of God's judgment, and deeply courageous and heroic in setting his face to go to the cross despite his own human dread of the pain involved. Could there be a more compelling figure, especially for men?

The Bible also clearly portrays men who are used of God, not as plaster saints, but as deeply flawed individuals who struggle in their faith. However, despite all their failings, when filled with God's Spirit, these men are used by God to win great victories and build God's eternal kingdom. All of this biblical data gives ample opportunity for ministers to show to young men in their congregation the exciting adventure that is the life of faith.

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[182] Eg. Matthew 7:3.

The historical and cultural setting of biblical stories is certainly far removed from the day-to-day world of today's men, but the principles illustrated can and must be grounded by preachers in the everyday world of all their listeners, including young men. The ministers in this study spoke of their efforts to apply the teaching of scripture particularly to the men in their congregations and to call these men to "step up to the mark" as husbands, fathers, and leaders in the church. Preachers must also not neglect to apply the scriptures to the world of work, which is an aspect of life that is central to men's self-understanding.

<u>Male Leadership</u>

Given the Bible's teaching on the roles of men and women in the family and the church, and given the sensitivity of men to anything that is perceived as feminine, it is important that men should see strong, mature men exercising leadership in their church, especially as elders and ministers. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that respondent Arthur is right in his assessment that the appointment of women to the eldership or pastorate can only be detrimental to ministry to men.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of the study point to the following implications for any congregation seeking to reach out to young men, to draw them into the centre of congregational life and to mature discipleship in Christ. First, priority needs to be given to ministry to young men. This priority needs to be worked out in the strategic thinking and planning of the congregation and in the commitment of time and effort on the part of ministers and other leaders. The recruitment of staff workers specifically to this end needs to be considered.

Second, building relationships with young men is essential. This is the key to addressing the misconceptions that keep men from active involvement and building the trust that makes it possible for men to "open up" to considering and discussing matters of faith and discipleship. For ministers and any other staff or voluntary leaders who engage in ministry to men, the long, slow business of pastoral work and intentional relationship building must also be given priority. While ministers must spend adequate time in preparation for the ministry of the word of God, men (and women) will be most attentive to the preaching of someone they know and respect. The challenges of discipleship will also be most readily taken up when presented in this same environment.

Third, sports and other activities can be used to build relationships. In this process of forming and deepening relationships, there is no alternative to spending both quality and quantity time with young men. To do this, it will often be helpful to initiate opportunities for sporting and recreational activities. A wide range of such activities have been utilized in the churches in this study, both within and outside church property. Each local church must find what will work in its own context, be imaginative and use a process of trial and error to find some means to build relationships with young men. Overseas mission trips can also be used with men. These can be very attractive, and where the main emphasis is on practical work, these projects can be attractive to men on the periphery of church life. Strong relationships can be forged in this context.

Fourth, men-only study groups can be key. Congregations should consider providing opportunities for men to explore the Christian faith or study the Bible in a male-only context and in a relaxed, non-threatening environment. This may be helped by providing food in some form.

Fifth, male-friendly worship services are important. Congregations should consider how their services of worship are accessible to young men, especially in the choice of songs and hymns, the style of music, the dress code, and the use made of men in the various aspects of leading worship. Preachers should also bear men in mind in the way they handle and apply scripture, and in the illustrations and applications they make.

Finally, ministers and other leaders working with younger men should familiarize themselves with the concept of "emerging adulthood" and the challenges and opportunities afforded by this stage in modern human development.

Recommendations for Further Research

One of the weaknesses of this research is that much of the data revealed by the interviews is related to men in general, rather than specifically young men in the age-group eighteen to thirty. The reason for this is quite simply that the ministers concerned are interested in working with all men, not just those of a certain age, so they found it difficult to distinguish between the approach they to take to men of different ages. In the PCI context, it is difficult to find churches that can provide data specific to this age-group. It may be that a wider study across denominations or wider than the Northern Ireland context would yield helpful data.

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