

THE FEMINIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY

SHEPHERD OF THE SPRINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

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THE FEMINIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY



THESIS: When it comes to membership, participation, and spiritual nurture in our churches, men (especially men who are highly masculine) are in scarce supply. Our churches' membership, participation, and spiritual nurturing are dominated by women, children, and male pastors. This is not a new condition in the churches of Western Christianity and is the result of long existing factors that are theological, cultural, and pervasive - some dating back to the 13th century.

While Lutheran theology offers many correctives, our churches nevertheless seem to suffer from the same demographics of low masculine involvement; and they have for generations. It is time for us to understand what some of these factors are and what can be done to bring men back into an active involvement with faith life in the Church, in our families, and in the world.

THE FEMINIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY



OUR STUDY WILL COVER . . .

- SOME CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS
- MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY CLARIFIED
- THE GENDER BALANCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
- THE MASCULINE LIFE OF FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST
- THE FEMINIZATION OF WESTERN CHRISTIANITY
- GENDER BALANCE RESTORED BY LUTHER AND THE WITTENBERG REFORMATION
- THE LOSS OF GENDER BALANCE IN NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

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SOME CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS



WOMEN TYPICALLY DOMINATE THE CHURCHES IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY
THEY OUTNUMBER MEN . . . IN THEIR PRESENCE.

PRESENCE (Barna survey data)

- Typical worship attendance is 61% female, 39% male
- 13 million more women than men will worship on a given Sunday.
- 25% of married women will worship without their husbands.
- Mid-week activities draw about 70 – 80% women.
- Other than pastors, the majority of church employees are women.
- 70% of boys being raised in the church will abandon it during teens and twenties.
- Christian universities are populated 2 to 1, women over men.

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SOME CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS



WOMEN TYPICALLY DOMINATE THE CHURCHES IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY
THEY OUTNUMBER MEN . . . IN THEIR PARTICIPATION.

PARTICIPATION: WOMEN ARE . . .

- 100% more likely to be involved in programs of Christian nurture
- 57% more likely to participate in adult education programs
- 56% more likely to hold positions of spiritual leadership (other than pastors)
- 40 % more likely to have personal devotional time and Bible reading

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SOME CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS



WOMEN TYPICALLY DOMINATE THE CHURCHES IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY
THEY OUTNUMBER MEN . . . IN THEIR PERSONALITY.

PERSONALITY

Predominance of men involved in Church tend to be more passive
with type B personalities.

Men (and women) with Type A masculine personalities tend more to
shy away from Church.

- Most men and boys are introduced to the Christian faith by women
- Most nurture of boys in the faith from pre-school, Sunday school, and parochial elementary school is carried out by women.
- Active men in our churches tend to become involved only with the physical, financial, and logistical operations of the congregation.
- Men tend to shy away spiritual involvement beyond attending worship.

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MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY CLARIFIED



MALENESS AND MASCULINITY – NOT THE SAME THING.

- *Maleness* is a physical or biological category and distinction.
- *Masculinity* relates to matters of gender = everything about being man that is not body: identity, a way of acting and living, mental qualities (cultural and spiritual qualities).
- Masculine is always referenced and understood over against what is feminine.
- A man must be willing to fight and inflict pain – but also suffer and endure pain (Jesus) To be ready to give up his life. Self-affirmation is almost in a self-abnegation. Jesus talked about losing your life to find and gain it . . . the acceptance of expendability, risk-taking, and self-sacrifice for others.

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MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY CLARIFIED



FEMALENESS AND FEMININITY – NOT THE SAME THING

- Femaleness is a physical or biological category and distinction.
- Feminine = contact, openness, communion – aim of communion is union.
- Feminine: continual unity, Active receptivity (not passive)
- Women face danger in childbirth – and not a choice. Men must make the choice.

Biblical Christianity would affirm Jesus as the ultimate embodiment of masculinity. His love compels him to confront the powers of evil, conquer them in death, but in his resurrection, return to his bride, the Church, as King and spouse.

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WHICH DO MOST ASSOCIATE WITH CHRISTIAN VALUES?

LEFT SET	RIGHT SET
Competence	Love
Power	Communication
Efficiency	Beauty
Achievement	Relationships
Skills	Support
Proving Oneself	Help
Results	Nurturing
Accomplishment	Feelings
Objects	Sharing
Technology	Relating
Goal-oriented	Harmony
Self-sufficiency	Community
Success	Loving cooperation
Competition	Personal expression

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Nursery	Toddlers	Child Care	Elder Care	Soup Kitchen	Women's Ministry
K-1st Grade Teacher	2nd-3rd Grade Teacher	4th-5th Grad Teacher	Jr. High Teacher	Sr. High Teacher	Adult Ed. Teacher
Youth Group	Women's circles	Prayer Ministry	Small Group Facilitator	Hospital Visitation	Support Groups
Flowers	Coffee	Weddings	Funerals	Showers	Potlucks
Usher	Committee Work	Building and Grounds	Financial	Choir	Organist

O = women best suited to serve, **X** = men best suited to serve

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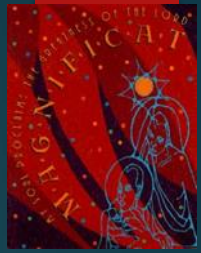
JESUS: THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF MANLY MASCULINITY



- Human masculinity in the NT is to provide protection and provision for community and to fend off the forces of evil; the world and the Devil in a life of spiritual warfare.
- Jesus born of woman, separates from her to suffer and die sacrificially for the welfare of all – and then to return victorious to claim and unite with his Bride, the Church.
- As the Father sent his Son, the Son sends men to suffer and die for His people. The Apostolic office and martyrdom were very closely related.
- Paul set up the relationship between husband and wife as that of Christ and His Church characterized by love and sacrifice (masculine) with love and obedience (feminine). (Eph. 5:22-25)
- The husband sacrifices for his wife and family as the wife sacrifices for the children.

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NEW TESTAMENT: BAPTISM CREATES ADOPTED SONS OF GOD



- Baptism recreates both males and females as sons of God, reborn in the image of Christ (Eph. 4:13)
- All of the nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and metaphors relating to the individual believer in the NT (Greek) are masculine.
- All adopted sons of God are called to a life that mirrors the three-fold aspects of the life of the incarnate and baptized Christ.
 - Growth and maturity
 - Battle against the Devil and all the powers of darkness
 - Service and sacrifice of the self out of love for the welfare of others in offices of personal vocation.
- *Greater love has no man than that he would lay down his life for his friend. (John 15:13)*

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THE FEMININITY OF THE CHURCH



- In the NT (Greek) all of the nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and metaphors that relate to the corporate Church are all feminine.
- The Church is always the Bride of Christ, and yet also, in union with her Lord, begets all sons of God as their Mother.
- **Note the balance:** all individual Christians are masculine – sons of God to be imitators of Christ, to sacrifice for others and to war against the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- This is the spiritual masculinity of individual men and women who grow from being immature babes in Christ, *in the Church*, the feminine Bride of Christ.
- Does the ethos of the average congregation reflect this balance? What do you think?

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THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD



- Remember – women are to participate in the masculinity of their individual life with God in Christ Jesus in the Church and world. This includes initiation into sacramental life, spiritual warfare, and even martyrdom.
- Baptism, confirmation, and especially The Lord's Supper involve initiation into a masculine participation in the mysteries (sacraments) of Christ (*mysterion* = *sacramentum*).
- Mystery initiations parallel masculine development – separation from mother and standing on your own spiritual feet under the under-shepherd of Christ.
- A *sacramentum* was an oath taken by a soldier inducted into the army and dedicated to faithfully take up its battles against the enemy. Think of the parallel spiritual warfare the Christian takes up.

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BACKDROP: THE ANCIENT CHURCH



A major influence on the ancient Church's understanding of godliness and spirituality were ascetic elements of Greek Stoicism.

- The ascetic life of self-denial and meager physical existence led to monasticism and the cloistered life - understood as optimal Christian living while awaiting the return of Christ.
- Virginity and celibacy were considered as spiritually superior to married life.
- This led to first 1.) priests could not remarry, then 2.) priests could not get married, to then 3.) priests could not be married.
- The romantic and erotic Song of Solomon's tribute to the Shulammitte woman (his bride) was reinterpreted to be a metaphorical tribute of Christ to his Church (Bride).

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Prior to the 13th Century, the churches at all times and places – east and west - had a majority of men over women in all aspects of religious life – just as in Judaism.

This changed in the Latin Church by three movements that had their beginning in the 13th century.

- 1.) The Bridal Mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux.
- 2.) A great woman's movement
- 3.) Medieval Scholastic theology flowing from Thomas Aquinas

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BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

- Bernard was one of the first promoters who raised armies for the Crusades to liberate the Holy Land from Islamic control.
- Barnard, however, is also the originator of *Medieval Bridal Mysticism*.
- While the early church applied the Song of Solomon metaphorically to the Christ and the Church, Barnard applied it metaphorically to Christ and the individual believer.
- He introduced an affective spirituality that subjectively united prayer and theology with sensual and erotic language reminiscent of the Song of Solomon . . . and then some.
- His use of this descriptive language was very appealing to women.

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BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

- Bernard's justification invoked the ancient 3rd century Church father, Origen: since the imagery can metaphorically be applied to the relationship of Christ with the Church, then it can also be used with the individual believer who is part of the Church.
- Bridal mysticism (with its eroticism) became the popular way by which the union of Christ with the human soul was expressed.
- The believer's soul is the bride of Christ . . . metaphorically speaking.
- Soon, and you knew it was coming . . .
- The metaphor dissolved!
- The eclipse of the metaphor exploded a woman's movement.

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THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

- Mystics (following Bernard) who wrote sensual and erotic devotional and prayer literature, were strongly represented by women.
- For some women, this bridal marriage to Christ was not simply higher than traditional marriage. It replaced it.
- This attitude helped contribute to the founding of female cloistered life with the explosion of convents for women.
- These women would forgo marriage to an eligible man to become permanently *married* to Christ.
- Scripture was seen as a series of love letters from Christ.
- The western Christian here became a feminine soul in love with her Bridegroom.

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THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

- The monks strenuously opposed the proliferation of convents and the popularity of cloistered life for women.
- They viewed monasticism as a male only fraternity.
- Established monasticism flourished for centuries, viewing optimal spiritual life as an ascetic life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience; a life of self-denial, living a higher calling of life with Christ as his humble servant.
- This is not what the cloistered women sought. For them, union and communion with their beloved bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, was the goal and objective viewed as the optimal spiritual life.
- One monk lamented: *God gave us wives, but the Devil has given us sisters!*

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THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

- Bridal mysticism also invaded the language of preaching, hymnody, prayers, and devotional life in the parish churches.
- Its impact was felt as early as the late 1200s where attendance and participation began to change to a predominance of women.
- One Baron von Regensburg noting the greater attendance of women wrote: *you women, who are more merciful than men and go more willingly to church than men and say your prayers more willingly than men and to sermons more willingly than men. (Podles 110)*
- *The feminization of the Church in the West was underway.*

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MEDIEVAL SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY – THE FEMININE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN SOUL

- Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is the originator of Scholastic theology that adopted the metaphysics of Aristotle.
- Aristotle believed that men were the formative cause of human nature; women supplied the material (think of the potter and the clay).
- Thus, he thought of women inferior to men, but also because he thought women were ruled by their affective side over their reasoning.
- Aquinas believed this understanding actually meant that women were spiritually superior to men.
- Aquinas held an Augustinian formative understanding of saving grace. Infused grace progressively transforms the human soul from a wretched sinner to a righteous saint. Obedient works co-operate.
- Women are more open to the formative and transformative work of the Holy Spirit - more receptive, more open to the reforming work of grace.

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MEDIEVAL SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY – A FEMININE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN SOUL

- Men have hardened, “crusty” sinful souls. They need to become more spiritually soft, receptive, and pliable like women.
- The will to surrender and passive receptivity are seen as central spiritual elements to receive and grow in life with God. These are feminine characteristics that both men and women need for openness to the Spirit’s transformative work. God seeks an essentially feminine response from both men and women.
- Femininity is subordinate obedience. Assertive masculinity is seen as an obstacle to grace and union with Christ.
- In Scholasticism, the will to surrender and passive receptivity are seen as central spiritual elements to receive and grow in holiness of life with God.

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ONE SHINING MOMENT: THE RESTORATION OF GENDER BALANCE – LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS & THE REFORMATION IN WITTENBERG

- God carries out *ALL* of his saving work through the external Word – NOT directly in the human heart (the Devil's playground).
- Justification bestows an alien righteousness of Christ that covers our sinful self: It does not reform it.
- Baptism: a daily dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ; a new life recreated in the image of Christ
- The individual believer is masculine with life that mirrors the life of Christ: 1.) growth and maturing (not reform); 2.) battles the world, the powers of darkness and the Devil; and 3.) offers sacrificial service to Christ through neighbors in home and secular society .
- The husband and father is the spiritual head of the family with responsibility to (continually) catechize his household.

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ONE SHINING MOMENT: THE RESTORATION OF GENDER BALANCE – LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS & THE REFORMATION IN WITTENBERG

- Union with Christ is a given in baptism; it is not a goal, nor does it admit to degrees. (Romans 6:3ff)
- The New Creation is reborn in the image of Christ as a perfect slave to God and Righteousness (Romans 6:18, 22; Eph 4:13); it is not defective and therefore needs no reform.
- Spiritual warfare increases; it does not decrease with maturity.
- Sanctification involves growth and maturing, not in any sense spiritual reform or healing.
- Union and communion with his Bride, the Church, is what the Lord provides in His supper. But also, then and there . . .
- the sons of God are nourished by their Lord through their Mother, to strengthen lives for more sacrifice and spiritual warfare.

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THE FEMINIZATION OF LUTHERANISM THROUGH PIETISM

- The influence of Pietism in the 18th and 19th century relocated the focus on Christ and working of the Spirit directly in the human heart.
- Devotional Bible reading around a table became the focal point of spiritual nurture rather than the Divine Service of the Word and Sacrament. Personal Bible reading replaced the proclaimed Word by the Pastor.
- The central objectives of the “readers” were 1.) to develop a closer, more intimate experience of Christ; 2.) receive greater indwelling of the Holy Spirit; and 3.) grow in holiness of living.
- Sanctification is understood as growth in holiness by the transformation of the believer’s soul aided by works.
- Liturgical Divine Service was seen as cold, dry, and spiritless.
- Growth, the experience of Christ, and holiness of living are the focus.

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FEMINISM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHURCHES



AMERICAN COLONIAL PERIOD

- Church registers from the beginning of the American colonial period uniformly reflect a majority of women to men in their membership.
- Revivals and First Great Awakening (1797-) was dominated by women. Fathers and husbands wanted little to do with them.
- The covenant community of the Puritans was predominantly women.
- In all other cases and geography, the men outnumbered the women, but in the churches, the women outnumbered the men - sometimes as much as 2-1.
- Pastors supplied for Lutheran colonists largely came from Lutheran pietist universities (e.g. Halle), and mission societies.

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FEMINISM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHURCHES



THE 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN CHURCH LIFE

- Common throughout the century were 2-1 ratios of women to men making up American congregational membership.
- The male clergy was consistently portrayed as men who were weak, sickly, and highly effeminate - momma's boys. This was especially characterized in the world of fiction written by women. Their heroines were highly religious, morally virtuous, with strong constitution often championing social causes. (Ann Douglas)
- Women dominated worship, revivals, prayer circles, the education of children, and social relief efforts.
- The Temperance Movement allied women and male ministers against the wiles and pleasures of men, especially young men.
- Revivalism was pointedly emotional and targeted only women. Husbands would join the church to please their "saved" wives.

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FEMINISM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHURCHES

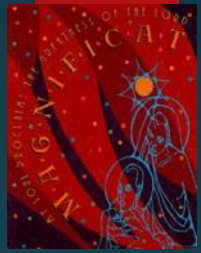


THE 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN CHURCH LIFE

- The minority of men in churches were characterized predominantly as being older, with more feminine characteristics, less educated in general, and having a weaker understanding of the articles of faith than women church goers.
- The greatest population of boys becoming men and leaving the church (all greater than girls), were those with strong masculine characteristics.
- The greatest studies focused on women in the church and expanding their roles - especially where the minority of men and/or pastors served - few studies on the absence of men.
- Women dominated almost exclusively the Christian education of the children in the churches (with the exception of the pastor for confirmation instruction).

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FEMINISM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHURCHES



THE PROTESTANT INFLUENCE IN NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCHES

- The majority of Lutheran pastors supplied by the old country for Lutheran congregations were of Lutheran pietist background.
- American Lutherans identified with strong protestant anti-Catholic sentiment. To be American, was to be anti-Catholic.
- To identify as Protestant, Lutherans popularly eliminated traditional vestments and paraments, crucifixes, the historic liturgies, and reduced sacramental observance and participation.
- Most popular devotional and Christian life literature read by Lutherans were written by Protestants.
- The recovery of distinctively Lutheran ministerial, liturgical, and sacramental practices have largely taken place progressively throughout the 20th century, particularly the latter half.

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QUESTIONS???

