



# F.A.C.S. REPORT

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## What's Inside:

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*"Men are conquerors, not losers. They seek victory in their activities, so why join a church which says failure is inescapable. . . .*

*"Given the numbers of women and children in the Church, it should not surprise us that the old battle hymns of Christianity have given way to basically feminine or childish sentimentality. . . .*

## FEMINIZING THE CHURCH

by Ian Hodge, Ph.D.

**F**OR MORE THAN two hundred years the Christian church has resounded to the words of hymns that evoke a particular spirit. That spirit is reflected in the hymns and songs sung in the church.

"Jesus loves me this I know" is what the children and adults are encouraged to sing.

"Oh, how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus, Oh, how I love Jesus" are the opening lines of another hymn, to a melodic line that is clearly in the romantic tradition.

The words of these hymns evoke a particular emotional response to the Gospel and the presentation of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Contrast the words above with those in this hymn: "Stand Up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross." Or, "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war." Even Luther's famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, displays a similar military sentiment,

as does the old favourite, *Rise Up O Men of God*.

Nothing could stand in greater contrast than the sentiments of these two groups of hymns. One group speaks of love while the other speaks of war. One speaks in a strong masculine tone while the other speaks in a softer, feminine temper. Both styles elicit a particular response to the Gospel message and present to us a way of thinking about the Christian faith.

It is possible to see in history a time when the church has reflected these particular attitudes. The Crusades were certainly a time when the militaristic and masculine view of the faith was predominant. Even earlier, Christianity, while not expanded by warfare, was certainly defended and upheld by various kings in Europe. Both Alfred the Great and Charlemagne had a hand in defending not just their subjects but the faith as well. Which is why, in victory, they baptized the defeated invasion leader and sent him home to live like a

Christian. Even earlier again, however, it is well to recall that the monks were preceded by the martyrs. "To be a Christian," argues Leon Podles, "involved a profound and heroic struggle. . . ." Now, the battle against sin and evil, at least in the Western world, has been replaced by an unhealthy sentimentalism. Warfare today is not seen in this religious light, unless you live in the Sudan, for example. Here warfare is clear and we wonder what kind of hymn the Christians in Sudan find most comfortable.

If we are not careful, however, we place these two sentiments in opposition to one another when, perhaps, they should rather be seen as part of a broader panorama where both views have their place. For the Christian community is made up of both males and females. And if the sentiments reflect a gender bias, then it is necessary to admit that both genders are essential and necessary. It is the bias that is the problem.

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But there is a catch here. If both sentiments are good and necessary, then the trick will be to hold them in balance. What happens, for example, in evangelism if the faith becomes overly masculine with its warlike aggressiveness? On the other hand, what occurs if we take away the masculinity of the faith and leave sentiment – romantic Enlightenment sentiment at that – in its place?

Here is a startling fact. Christian churches are populated by more women than men. There is an absence of men in the Christian church, especially in the Western Christian church, both Catholic and Protestant. And the problem is, apparently, centuries old. There is a more even balance of males and females in Orthodox and Jewish faiths than there is in Western Christianity. We cannot explain why other faiths appeal to men better than Christianity, but we recognise the fact and take it on as a problem to solve.

Does this gender imbalance have anything to do with the fact that the popular hymns no longer talk about doing battle for the Kingdom but instead having a loving relationship with Jesus and other people? Is this why hugging in some churches has become a non-cultural norm? It's not that either view denies the other; it is just that one of these views tends to dominate over the other. And we cannot help wondering if this imbalance is healthy.

What is more important, we wonder if this imbalance has anything to contribute to the decline of Christianity in the West. Is it just a coincidence that as the masculine view gave way to the feminine view that the church has declined in her influence? Despite all the revivals and evangelistic campaigns, Christian influence is on the decline, and while not an exclusive cause of the decline, we believe it is a contributing cause.

What kind of response do we seek to elicit from the Gospel? Before we answer this question, however, some discussion on the history of the church can provide a backdrop for us to see more clearly how we should respond to this issue.

## Revivalism

**T**HE REVIVALIST MENTALITY in the church, even 250 years after the Revivals, finds it convenient to approach men through their wives and/or children. Many outreach activities of the local churches are geared towards children's events (Sunday School, Holiday Clubs, Beach Missions) or women's events (Ladies' coffee nights, luncheons, mothers' club, daytime study groups for housewives, etc).

It is no wonder that our churches are marked by an absence of men. Not many Protestant churches are predominantly male, or even equally male-female. I've heard some ministers bemoan the fact that they have many women and few men in the church. Given their tactics for recruiting new converts, this should not be surprising. Given the numbers of women and children in the Church, it should not surprise us that the old battle hymns of Christianity have given way to basically feminine sentimentality.

Look at the typical church today. Who is most likely to be leading the singing, participating in choir or orchestra (or band in some churches), or even to be in vocal groups leading the singing? There are men doing these jobs, but the predominantly female component of these activities is clear.

However, even when men participate, there is still a tendency to feminize the issues. The pastors in many churches who lead are hardly

likely to be leaders of other men. They are often identified by the groups of women who follow them. (Little wonder so many become caught in compromising situations with members of the opposite sex.) The group leaders in the churches display a similar propensity for the "softer" feminine side of Christianity.

Now, we do not want to say this is completely wrong. But we do suggest that this imbalance weakens the faith *and makes it less attractive to other men*. And if we are looking for the failure of modern evangelism to appeal to men, we probably don't have to look much further than this tendency to feminize the faith as being a hindrance, at the human level, to successful outreach. Most men do want to come down to the church and sing about "love" and sentimental emotion when they can mix with their pals and friends at the club and speak of conquests — in love, sport and business if not in war. At the church, conquest is hardly ever mentioned because most churches teach that Christians cannot expect to conquer like they do in these other areas. They speak of the failure of Christianity to do no more than rescue a few souls for eternity, while the mass mankind is doomed to hell.

Why on earth would men join a losing organisation? Men are conquerors, not losers. They seek victory in their activities, so why join a church which says failure is inescapable.

On the other hand, the feminine nature is to woo with gentleness and kindness. The female will conquer through these character traits rather than aggression. Look in any home and see the differences between the husband and wife in the rearing of the children. Here we see the male-female distinctive in action.

Here is a problem the church has made for itself. By emphasising sentimentality rather than the vigorous war-like nature of Christianity that constantly must battle with sin and the forces of evil, Christianity has emasculated itself from male dominance and therefore male leadership. In so doing, however, it has emptied the pews of the warrior class. The history of the church, when it has succeeded in particular battle with evil, has been an organization that has been led by men. It was Martin Luther

who precipitated a crisis within Catholicism that led to a cataclysmic split. Jesus selected male disciples, not because He was a chauvinist, but because of the particular gifts He gave to men at creation. None of the books of the Bible is authored by a woman, yet women play predominant roles within Christianity.

However, the problem does not stop just with an imbalance in the gender presentation of Christianity. The problem expands when we take into account that if Christianity is presented as a particularly *feminine* faith, then men who join its ranks must abandon masculinity and take on Christianity's apparent femininity. The problematic nature of this issue has been highlighted by Leon Podles.

Jonathan Edwards, in eighteenth-century America, preached to young women of Christ, who "will be your lover, yea, he will be your glorious bridegroom. You are invited this day to the marriage feast of the king's son, not on as a guest, but as a bride." He pleads with women to "let him have your love who is fairer than the sons of men and is the most excellent, lovely and honorable lover." Wesley continued this imagery in *Jesus Lover of My Soul*. Catholic sentimental hymnology of the nineteenth century had a communion hymn, *O Lord I am not Worthy*, that referred to Jesus as the "bridegroom of my soul." Promise Keepers, a movement that is trying to bring men back into church life, has inherited this language. Its founder, Bill McCartney, claims that "we are created to be in a love affair with Jesus" and "Scripture tells us the *only* way to please God is to be passionately in love with Jesus Christ." Evangelical Protestantism, despite its efforts to recruit men, is hampered by a tradition that not only emphasizes verbal expressions of emotion, but highly feminine emotions at that.<sup>2</sup>

This is the dilemma that faces Christianity. It must, if it seeks to

attract men, offer a masculine faith. The acceptance of homosexuality in the church, for example, will not make a masculine church; rather, it will drive real men away because they abhor it. The singing of sentimental hymns will do little to attract a true masculinity.

Revivalism . . . increases the percentage of me active in the Church, but it is not successful over the long run because the churches into which men are led by revival are still so feminized that the process of gender identification takes over, and converted men (and even more their sons) start putting distance between themselves and church life. Conversion can lead men into the Church, but the Church they enter must also have a spirituality that allows them to be both men and Christians – they cannot be real Christians unless they become real men.<sup>3</sup>

This problem with masculinity that is identified in the church has a wider aspect to it. It represents a confusion over the role of the respective genders. George Gilder identified that lack of a masculinity as a broader sociological problem. In arguing against co-ed schools Gilder pointed out that

Adolescent boys are radically different from adolescent girls. The boys, for example, are at the pinnacle of sexual desire and aggressiveness. In school, what they chiefly need is male discipline and challenge, ideally without girls present to distract them. Girls, on the other hand, are less aggressive and sexually compulsive at this stage and are more willing to study without rigid policing and supervision. Thus a classroom that contains both boys and girls will hurt both. The boys will be excelled and demoralized by the girls; the girls will be distracted and demoralized by the boys. Both sexes will be damaged by the continuous disciplining that the rebellious and unsuccessful boys require.<sup>4</sup>

Education, argues Gilder, emphasises feminine activities such as writing, rather than including masculine activities. When boys should be tinkering with engines, discovering the world of possibilities with the computer technology, they are instead asked to sit and read and write. While it is argued that females can program computers as well as males, the programming marketplace is dominated by males, just as the secretarial market is dominated by females.

Even in sport gender identification is blurred. Women become great athletes not by being female but by taking male hormones, minimizing their bust lines, and building men-shaped bodies.

Now the broader sociological problem that Gilder identifies is either the cause of the problem in the church or else the church is the cause of the cultural issue. As we turn to the Bible, we see that the cause of the problem has its root in the Fall. In his attempts to be his own god (Gen. 3: 5), man turns God's order upside down. Rather than seeing themselves as a helper to their husbands, women are ready and willing to take on the role of head of the home. In their desire to abdicate their responsibilities, this feminine headship is accommodated by men who will not exercise the role of prophet, priest and *king*. In short, men will not rule and women will not submit to being ruled.

In this topsy turvy world, the Church should be addressing the issue. If Christianity is the antidote to the problem of sin and the problems that it causes, then the Church should have programs that reinforce masculinity while at the same time enhancing femininity. There can be no confusion in the roles of men and women since the Bible is clear on what God requires. It is our unwillingness to conform with Scripture that is the problem. This gives us some indication of the propensity to sin in mankind, as even

2 *Ibid.*, p. 117. The quotes from Jonathan Edwards are taken from Perry Miller's "Jonathan Edwards' Sociology of the Great Awakening," *New England Quarterly* 21 (1948): p. 68. The quote from Bill McCartney is from "God is Calling Us to a Higher Love," in *Go the Distance: The Making of a Promise Keeper*, ed. John Trent (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1996), p. 13.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

4 George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1987) p. 117-118.

the redeemed struggle to put God's requirements in place.

## The Road to Reform

**T**O SPECULATE on how we fix the problem is time consuming, not to mention difficult. But if the Christian faith is the solution to the issues on a broader social scale, then until we fix the Church we cannot fix anything else.

How, then, can we make our churches more masculine? The problem is not so easy to address because it is ingrained. According to Podles, the problem has been around for several hundred years. A false spirituality, together with a wrong view of the church, has assisted in the demise of the faith in the West. To turn it around will not be so easy.

The clergy, for starters, will need to stop drinking tea with the ladies and take on activities that attract males and build masculinity.

This in itself represents a major problem, since to abandon the current congregation of women somewhat to restore an older balance between the genders will play havoc in many congregations. It will be a brave clergyman who will commence to ignore the ladies in his church to spend his time with men! Who is in charge in the family today? Until individual families address this issue, and until they are challenged and exhorted to address it from the pulpit, there is unlikely to be any significant change.

If that change can take place in families, however, there is a chance that it could take place in the church. Men, revitalized by a home that has established proper male and female roles, will come to the church invigorated and ready to initiate change.

But the church must also address the broader theological issues that make it unattractive for men. The church feminine must become the church militant. They church

pessimistic about the future must become the church optimistic that it can and will – by the grace of God – bring real reform in the lives of individuals, families and therefore the nations of the world.

The welcome sign that change is in the air is home schooling. Families are taking on responsibility for the education of their young. Husbands and wives are finding new meaning to the word family and its place in God's scheme of things. As families take on education they are also taking on the responsibility of employment. Family businesses are attracting many Christians and this can only reinforce the family as a centre of great influence. The roles of husband and wife will still need to be identified and addressed on a broader scale. But reform is on the way. God has promised it, and sooner or later it will appear on the horizon for all to see and identify with.