In 1987 Nancy Hardesty wrote that noninclusive language “offers a distorted gospel to Christians and those wanting to become Christians. It conveys the message that the Christian faith is for men only or at least for men primarily.”¹ In doing so she rightly suggests that the use of inclusive or noninclusive language has serious implications for evangelism. Ironically, she states this immediately after noting that the ratio of women to men in most churches is two to one. “Thus,” she says, “the use of male language excludes roughly two thirds of any given congregation from the most meaningful participation.”² This raises the question, if women are the ones who are feeling excluded, why are the men largely absent from the pews? If our message is slanted toward men, why do mostly women respond?

Conventional wisdom has it that men do not participate because they are not the “joiners” that women are, that they don’t participate in groups to the extent that women do. On the face of it this seems reasonable. However, in the same time period that Hardesty was writing Inclusive Language in the Church, 56% of the women in America and 53% of the men participated in volunteer organizations, by no means a significant difference.³ Apparently men, at least in America, are joiners to about the same extent as women.

Conventional wisdom also suggests that men are naturally less religious than women. It holds to the myth that men have always and in every place been less active in religious life. Again, these seems feasible at first glance, but there are several indications which argue against it. First, if it is true that men are less religious than women, then the discrepancy in participation between them should hold across all, or at least most, religions. Yet neither so-called “high religions” such as Islam and Buddhism, nor religions involving ancestor worship, nor animism suffer from a difference in male-

²Ibid.
³Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1986
female participation. One man who had converted from the animistic religion of his tribe put it in proper perspective when asked if the men of his tribe were less active in their religion than the women. "How could they be less active?" he said. "For them religion is life—life is religion. It would not occur to them to leave it out." Apparently in cultures which have not artificially separated the mind, body, and spirit into independent spheres of concern, men are equally as religious as women.

A second indication that men are equally as religious is the use of religious forms as a means of trying to gain control over uncertain circumstances. To illustrate: It would be difficult to imagine a field of endeavor in American society with which men more closely identify than professional sports. Yet here we find the most pervasive presence of religious forms in mainstream American life. Professional baseball player-turned-anthropologist George Gmelch documents well the many and varied rituals, taboos, and fetishes professional athletes employ in an effort to insure success.5

Of course, the use of religious forms by men is not limited to professional athletes. They are found consistently in the volunteer organizations to which men belong in great numbers. The initiation ceremonies of the Shriners, or the Masonic funeral rites, contain more high ritual and rich symbolism than many local church worship services. Even civic organizations such as Rotary International or the Jaycees begin every meeting with rituals affirming their creeds, and many include explicit references to religious concerns. Participation in rituals of this type does not in and of itself prove that a man is religious. However, these are the things which are most often cited as things about religion men do not appreciate, and yet in the organizations which men themselves have formed for men, these elements are consistently present.

A third indication that men are not less religious than women is the apparent ebb and flow of men’s participation in the American church over the past 200 years, mirrored by a flow and ebb in alternative, explicitly masculinized religious organizations such as the Free Masons. Such

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organizations experienced a surge in membership in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{5} At this same time, men expressed their disdain for clergymen because of their lack of masculinity. They were characterized at best as "a sort of people between men and women,"\textsuperscript{7} and at worst as "domesticated pets of widows and spinsters, fit only to balance teacups and mouth platitudes."\textsuperscript{8} William Strauss and Neil Howe note that, of the four generational types in their model, "Idealists show the strongest attachment to their mothers and the most conflict with their fathers....Again and again, from Puritans to Boomers, rising Idealists have given spiritual awakenings an anti-masculine flavor."\textsuperscript{9} In \textit{Manhood in America}, Michael Kimmel illustrates how strongly that flavor was communicated. He quotes the following description an American Methodist minister gave of a man's transformation after accepting Christ:

> It is wonderful to see a great burly man, mostly animal, who has lived under the dominion of his lower nature and given reign to his natural tendencies, when he is born of god and begins to grow in an upward and better direction. His affections begin to lap over his passion....The strong man becomes patient as a lamb, gentle as the mother, artless as the little child.

Comments Kimmel, "No wonder men had developed their clubs and fraternal orders as alternative religious institutions and used the saloon or Grange Hall as their secular temples."\textsuperscript{10} The emergence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7}W. J. Rorabaugh, \textit{The Alcoholic Republic}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 220.
\end{itemize}
of the “mythopoetic” men’s movement characterized by Robert Bly\(^{11}\) and Sam Keen\(^{12}\) may be seen as a contemporary successor to the fraternal orders which, while still present, have declined in popularity and impact.

As men have disappeared from the church in response to these shifts, both church and para-church groups have undertaken corrective measures to strive to reach men. In the late 1850s and 1860s “Muscular Christianity” made its way from England to America through novels and articles by Charles Kinsley, Thomas Hughes, and Thomas Higginson. The Young Men’s Christian Association was founded in England and then transplanted to North America. At the turn of the century, evangelist Billy Sunday was so successful in reaching men in tent revivals that established churches began to follow his lead. The Men and Religion Forward Movement, led by founder Fred Smith, Henry Rood, and notable clergy such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, saw a link between masculine Christianity and social activism. Men responded so strongly that the movement is described as having swept the country in 1911-1912 “like a spiritual storm” and is credited by one observer as having increased the number of men coming to church by up to 800 percent.\(^{13}\) Today’s Promise Keeper’s movement stands as a successor to the evangelical para-church men’s movement’s of the last century. It remains to be seen whether the church will respond as positively as it did at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Current Situation and Research

In the closing years of the twentieth century the church finds itself once again in unfortunately familiar territory. According to Lyle Schaller, in the 1950s church participation by women and men mirrored the ratio of women to men in America.\(^{14}\) By 1989, 46% of the women in the United States


\(^{14}\)Personal interview with the author, September 23, 1990.
regularly attended church compared to only 38% of the men.\textsuperscript{15} In 1987 the author began field research to uncover men’s reasons for not participating in church life. Interviews with unchurched men revealed several themes,\textsuperscript{16} but the most consistent was “Church is for women, children, and wimps.” In other words, the church was perceived in feminine terms.

In 1989 the author conducted a study utilizing Q Methodology\textsuperscript{17} to test the pervasiveness of this perception. Both churched and unchurched, male and female respondents sorted a deck of 30 perceived masculine and 30 perceived feminine personality characteristic cards into a distribution from “Most like a good Christian” to “Least like a good Christian.” A strong consensus emerged, with an unusually high 43 of the 60 items being similarly ranked by all respondents. Of the 20 items identified as being characteristic of Christians, 18 were feminine. Of the 23 items identified as being uncharacteristic of Christians, 20 were masculine. In 1990 the author conducted a series of focus groups with members of Sunday school classes and Bible study groups in which he asked the groups to identify and discuss the primary themes of the Christian faith. The 10 most mentioned responses all came from American culture’s feminine set, including such themes as support, nurture, humility, and dependence.\textsuperscript{18}

These findings led the author to hypothesize that one source of the “feminine Christian” stereotype might be the themes Christians themselves chose to emphasize. He therefore constructed


\textsuperscript{17}Q Methodology asks respondents to sort items (in this case a deck of cards with words or phrases naming personality characteristics) into a quasi-normal distribution ranging from “Most like” to “Least like” something (in this case “a good Christian”). The resulting data is factor analyzed to determine different types of perceivers, as well as general perceptions. For a full discussion of this and the following studies, see W. L. Davis, “Beyond the Personal Pronoun: Gender Schemas and Men’s Responses to Christians and Their Messages,” (Ph. D., University of Kentucky, 1991).

\textsuperscript{18}A review of the 1992 study by Office of Research of the General Council on Ministries titled “Pastoral Leadership: Admired Values and Essential Skills Identified by United Methodist Laity,” is consistent with these findings. The “feminine” values of support, nurture, compassion, etc. are mentioned by 8.8% to 43.9% of the respondents, while the “masculine” values of influence, ambition, independence, etc. are mentioned by only .5% to 3.3%!
10 conversational statements, based on Christian educational and sermonic material, using the themes identified previously. He then asked 93 churched and 98 unchurched men to rate them as part of a "Conversational Perceptions Survey" (see Appendix I). Respondents were to rate on a seven point scale how likely they would be to use each statement in a conversation with a male friend and a female friend, and how likely an independent, an assertive, a sensitive, and a gentle person would be to use each statement. A measure of each person's "gender schematicity" was also taken, indicating the extent to which he identified with America's definitions of masculinity and femininity. Results showed significant effects for both churchedness and schematicity. The churched men strongly endorsed use of the messages for both men and women, and there was no significant difference between their usage ratings for men and for women. The unchurched men did not endorse the messages, but perceived them as significantly more appropriate for women. In addition, the more an unchurched man identified with the cultural definition of masculinity, the lower he rated the messages for use with men. Androgynous or "combination" unchurched men made the largest distinction between use with men and use with women, whereas androgynous churched men made no significant distinction and had the rate highest message-use rating for both men and women. Apparently androgynous men outside the church feel the need to edit their communication to fit cultural norms, while androgynous men inside the church feel free to express themselves fully.

In sum, then, this study showed, 1) that gender appropriateness is a primary measure by which unchurched men assess statements containing Christian themes, and 2) that churched men report they would make such statements to other men, while unchurched men consider them altogether inappropriate for use with men. These findings suggest that the contemporary quest for inclusive language has been far too limited in scope. For men outside the church, the issue of inclusive language appears to extend beyond the use of male-referent nouns and pronouns to the very themes Christians choose to communicate.

To test this hypothesis the author constructed 10 additional conversational statements using

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19 These four personality characteristic ratings provided a validity check for how the statements were perceived in relation to the gender schema. In previous studies the author had found that "independent" and "assertive" had the highest loadings on the masculine factor, while "gentle" and "sensitive" had the highest loadings on the feminine factor. Thus, these ratings indicated how masculine and how feminine each of the statements were perceived to be.
masculine themes which also express a Christian worldview (see Appendix 2) and incorporated them into the Conversational Perceptions Survey. A balanced sample of one hundred seventy-six unchurched and churched men and women rated the statements as before. Separate indices for the feminine statements' use and the masculine statements' use, with men and with women were computed. Two-way analysis of variance of the scores for these indices showed main effects for both churchedness and sex of the respondents. That is, there were significant differences between the responses of churched and unchurched persons, and between men and women. In order to identify the significantly different groups each combination was recoded as a binary variable and entered in a one-way analysis of variance, utilizing Tukey's alternate multiple comparisons test (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1. Usage Ratings for Feminine and Masculine Christian Statements by Churched and Unchurched Men and Women</th>
<th>Column 1 Feminine Statement with a Man</th>
<th>Column 2 Masculine Statement with a Man</th>
<th>Column 3 Feminine Statement with a Woman</th>
<th>Column 4 Masculine Statement with a Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unchurched Women</td>
<td>Mean: 41.16&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 13.18</td>
<td>Mean: 49.58&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.46</td>
<td>Mean: 50.03&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.79</td>
<td>Mean: 55.50&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 10.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchurched Men</td>
<td>Mean: 42.36&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 13.35</td>
<td>Mean: 52.50&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.12</td>
<td>Mean: 44.00&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.82</td>
<td>Mean: 51.82&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churched Women</td>
<td>Mean: 47.78&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 12.28</td>
<td>Mean: 53.96&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.76</td>
<td>Mean: 53.88&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.29</td>
<td>Mean: 57.76&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 10.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churched Men</td>
<td>Mean: 49.89&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 11.54</td>
<td>Mean: 58.50&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 8.81</td>
<td>Mean: 51.94&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 10.36</td>
<td>Mean: 56.40&lt;br&gt;Std. Dev.: 9.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 A measure of the respondents' gender schematicity was taken. While preliminary analysis showed results for schematicity's influence on the message ratings, the sample is not yet of sufficient size to provide predictive power for the 3 (gender schema) x 2 (churchedness) x 2 (sex) factorial design.

21 i.e. Combining churchedness with sex of respondents gives four binary variables: unchurched men, unchurched women, churched men, and churched women

22 This procedure (also known as Tukey-b) uses conservative measures to guard against finding significant differences merely as a result of performing a high number of comparisons.
Churched men were significantly more likely than were either unchurched men or women to use feminine Christian statements with a man (c.f. Column 1,a). This finding is consistent with the earlier study. Churched women were not significantly different from the other groups in their rating of the feminine statements with men.

Only churched men and unchurched women were significantly different in rating masculine statements for use with men (c.f. Column 2,b). The difference seems to be a function of the women’s perception of appropriate statements from a woman to a man, as evidenced they their strong endorsement of these same messages for use with other women (Compare Row 1, Columns 2 and 4). This is an important finding, as it suggests that the gender schema remains a factor in the evaluation of the masculine messages. The unchurched women strongly endorsed these messages’ use with women, but were significantly less likely to use them with a male friend. Thus, they identify with the themes expressed, though they consider them inappropriate for a woman to say to a man.

It is also important that unchurched men did not differ significantly from churched men with regard to the use of masculine messages with men (or women) while they did differ with regard to the use of the feminine messages. Unchurched men were significantly less likely than any other group to use the feminine statements, even with women. They clearly do not identify with the feminine themes. Unchurched women, in contrast, strongly endorsed the feminine statements, as did the churched men and women (c.f. Column 3,c), but only for use with women.

There were no significant differences between any of the groups with regard to the use of the masculine messages with women (c.f. Column 4, d). All strongly endorsed their use. A review of the message characteristic ratings helped to explain why. It revealed that these messages were perceived as something a sensitive and a gentle person would say as much as an independent and an assertive person. A highly important finding is that both the unchurched and churched women’s strongest endorsements were for the use of the masculine statements with a woman. In addition, there is no significant difference between the unchurched women’s or the churched women’s ratings for the masculine statements with a man and feminine statements with a woman (compare Columns

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23It is intriguing that, while the single word themes are commonly associated with masculinity, statements expressing those themes are perceived as appropriate for both men and women, and as both sensitive/gentle and independent/assertive.
2, e&f and 3e&f), but there is a significant difference between their ratings for the masculine statements with a man and the other two ratings (compare Column 4, g&h with Columns 2 and 3, g&h).

In sum, then, this study confirmed the findings of the previous studies (see page 6) with regard to unchurched men's response to feminine Christian messages—messages which Christian men indicated they are likely to use. The addition of churched and unchurched women to the sample, and masculine statements to the survey enables us to see these findings in a more complete context. It reveals that unchurched women also consider the feminine messages inappropriate for use with a man, but that both men and women, churched and unchurched identify strongly with the masculine statements and consider them appropriate for use with both men and women, particularly when in a conversation with a person of their own sex.

Implications

The results of the studies outlined above suggest that, while issues such as influence, power, discipline, courage, etc., are associated with men and masculinity in America\(^2\), both women and men identify with messages expressing those themes. Therefore, if the church will emphasize these themes, we may expect both women and men to respond.

Some will say that adopting such themes amounts to baptizing secular values which are not particularly Christian and which perpetuate patriarchy. Such would be the view of Sheila Collins, who identifies patriarchy as "the whole complex of sentiments, the patterns of cognition and behavior, and the assumptions about human nature and the nature of the cosmos that have grown out of a culture in which men have dominated women."\(^{25}\) Brian Wren also cautions against using the language of power and hierarchy, saying that "we should be highly suspicious when we realize that God, theologized as beyond male and female, is overwhelmingly depicted and praised in male terms".


as the highest hierarch (king) at the top of every power pyramid (*Almighty God*).  

Yet it is this author's contention that such a position goes too far. It comes close to saying that things commonly associated with masculinity are the *problem* and those things associated with femininity are the *solution*. Or, to put it more theologically, masculinity is sin and femininity is righteousness. James Dittes puts it this way:

Though the specific indictments and recipes vary, the conventional wisdom goes something like this:

Men are—and shouldn't be—controlling and dominating, preoccupied with performance and competition, over intellectualizing and underfeeling, defensive and withholding, workaholic, narcissistic, disconnected.

Men should be—and aren't—expressive of feelings, sensitive, vulnerable, caring about relationships, wanting to make commitments—and willing to stop and ask for directions.  

Is it not more theologically sound to consider that men and women are equally created in the image of God, that masculine characteristics—however they are defined by a given culture—may be expressions of the image of God just as the feminine characteristics are? This is certainly the witness of scripture: "So God created humankind (Heb. *adam*) in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Gen. 1:27, NRSV)

What does this mean in specific terms? Let us take as an example men's need for achievement. Margaret Mead notes that "in every known human society, the male's need for achievement can be recognized," regardless of the activity the culture defines as male. Men's need for achievement is often interpreted as drivenness, caused by a weak ego or a demanding parent or some other demon. But suppose instead that it is an expression of the creative and sustaining image

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28 In the study outlined above this is expressed in the "fulfillment" statement (# 16). See Appendix 2.

of God. Humankind is placed in the garden, not simply to "be" and enjoy its beauty and its fruits, but to participate with God in its on-going creation and care: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Gen. 2:15 NRSV) Mead goes on to observe that in many societies the need to achieve is linked to some activity that women are not allowed to practice. She explains this phenomenon as men's need to preserve their maleness, "that men do need to find reassurance in achievement, and because of this connection, cultures frequently phrase achievement as something women do not or cannot do, rather than directly as something which men do well.  

If we understand the need for achievement as an expression of the creative and sustaining image of God then we may see men's tendency to exclude women from certain activities as an expression of original sin, or a marring of God's image. Women participate in God's creativity in ways men can't even imagine. It is the greatest gulf that separates women and men—conception, development, and birth. Men are directly involved in the creation of their children for only a fleeting moment. By the time conception has occurred, the father has been relegated to observer. Even the joy of their child's development holds the twinge of distance—as a kick felt only second-hand through the walls of the womb. It is the mother's blood that brings life to their child, not his. It is she who will give birth, not him. It will happen whether he is present or not. So he longs for a realm of creativity he can call his own, and in his self-centeredness he carves out an area that is for men alone, where he can achieve something she supposedly cannot. It is not that "his maleness has to be underwritten by preventing women from entering some field or performing some feat." It is that he desires a greater role in creation and gains it by claiming an achievement that is exclusively his. Thus it is not men's focus on achievement or performance which needs to be called into question, but the self-centered and exclusive expression of it.

As a second example, let us look at men's hierarchical orientation. The conventional wisdom, again, is that this is a flaw in the make-up of men. Elizabeth Dodson Gray interprets Psalm

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30ibid. p. 160.

31ibid. Emphasis added.

32In the study outlined above this is expressed in the "place in the plan" statement (# 7). See Appendix 2.
8:3ff ("What are human beings that you are mindful of them..." NRSV) in this fashion when she says,

And there you have the basic flaw in this mental picture, namely a cosmic hierarchical ranking of values. The illusion is that you can look at reality, find out what the value of each thing is, and then rank it according to that which is more valuable (and is always "up") and has dominion over that which is of lower value (and is "down").

Gray and others are accurate in their description of how this hierarchical model has been used as a rationale for the domination of various classes of people as well as nature. Their solution is the replacement of hierarchical thought with systemic or "wholistic" or "connectional" thinking which is apparently lateral rather than vertical. Letty Russell writes, for example, that "the gift of New Creation by a loving Creator should be sufficient for us to see reality in a new way, so that we see all of creation, not as a hierarchy, but as an interdependent partnership of life in which we bring to the world signs of wholeness and shalom."[34]

Such reasoning, however, assumes that the hierarchical conception of reality is an entirely social construction. It holds that hierarchy is in no way woven into the fabric of creation, nor into our relationship with the Creator. It conceives of nature as a benevolent web of cooperative relationships in which individual creatures work together in an atmosphere of equality and affection. Yet the fact is that nature is rife with hierarchies, from the pecking order in every bird's nest to the system that produces an alpha female in every lion pride. And certainly our relationship with our Creator is hierarchical. Indeed, the first sin is set in the context of a refusal to accept this hierarchical relationship: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5, NIV)

This reasoning also assumes that hierarchies are inherently evil, that the descent to domination is inevitable. It holds that there is no interdependence in a hierarchy and that no good can come from a hierarchical relationship. Finally it holds that there is no sense in which there are hierarchical relationships within the Trinity.[35]


35c.f. Nancy Hardesty's statement, "The three persons are equal; they are not to be identified with each other or separated from each other; they are not to be subordinated one to another. They do not..."
The question is, are these assumptions warranted? Is it not possible that hierarchies exist, not just as socially constructed realities, but as objective realities which were created by God as expressions either of God's plan or God's nature. Does hierarchy necessarily mean domination and oppression, or are these perhaps expressions of the fallenness of creation? Scripture suggests that there can be a redeemed expression of hierarchy that is neither paternalistic nor patriarchal (in the negative senses in which those words have come to be used). In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul ranks the gifts of the Spirit in clear hierarchical fashion: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." (1 Cor. 12:28, NIV) But he precedes this statement with a discussion of the church as an interdependent system in which all parts of the body are of equal importance and where "God gives greater honor to the parts that lacked it." He then follows his hierarchical description by identifying the love which characterizes God as its operating principle.

In using this pattern Paul was following Jesus' lead. Though the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly developed, John 12:44 through 17:26 provides the fullest treatment in Scripture of the relationship among the persons of the Trinity, most of it in words attributed to Jesus. In it we find an extraordinary mix of hierarchical language coupled with expressions of unity and love. Jesus is sent by the Father (12:44, 15:21), and says and does only what the Father commands (12:49-50, 14:31, 15:10), but is one with the Father (12:45, 16:15, 17:10-11,21). Jesus will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit and both he and the Father send the Spirit (15:26, 16:7). The Spirit also speaks only as the Father directs (16:13) and brings glory to the Son (16:14). And the defining principle by which this mix of command, obedience and unity operates is love (17:22-26). All of this suggests that the Trinity may be, humanly speaking, a paradox of hierarchy and equality, directiveness and mutuality. This would make sense of the presence of hierarchies throughout creation, as well as men's tendency to see things in hierarchical terms. If both men and women carry the image of God, is it not logical to consider both men's and women's primary ways of perceiving reality as reflective of that image? In this view, it would be not hierarchical thinking but the tendency to represent a hierarchy." op. cit. p. 55. Emphasis added.
for it to be expressed in terms of dominance, exclusion, and oppression that would be reflective of the fallen nature of humankind.

Of course, an alternative view would be that expressions of hierarchical thinking in Scripture, whether by Jesus or anyone else, are indicative of the cultural context in which they are found, rather than any ontological reality. Such would be the opinion of revolutionary feminist Mary Daly or reformist feminist Rosemary Radford-Reuther. Yet even if we grant such a view, then Jesus's use of hierarchical language becomes an expression of God's accommodation to human limitations. The question then arises, in the context of evangelism is there not still a need for such accommodation? This points to:

**Inclusive Language as an Evangelistic Issue**

When it comes to the arena of evangelism there are unique considerations which bear on the inclusive language debate. In evangelism we are dealing with pre-Christian people who do not yet share significant portions of the Christian worldview, and who may consciously reject the Christian worldview as a whole. They frequently have misperceptions about the Christian faith and life, and make judgements about Christianity on the basis of limited, stereotypical information. This means that our first task in evangelism is to gain a *hearing* among pre-Christian people and, in many cases, overcome or correct their current image of Christianity, Christians, and the Church. It also means that in evangelism we must maintain our focus on the primary or ultimate issue—persons’ relationship with God in Christ.

Gaining a hearing and helping people have an accurate picture of the Christian faith requires adapting to their thought-world, using language, images, illustrations, and themes with which they can identify. In other words, it means being incarnational. God, who is wholly other than us, adapted or accommodated to us and came to us in human form. Throughout his ministry as he strived to

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37Discussions of each of the masculine themes used in the study is beyond the scope of this paper. Similar reasoning to that presented in the discussion of achievement and hierarchical thinking could be followed for each.
reach people with the good news, Jesus continued to accommodate to his hearers. He used both masculine and feminine language, images, illustrations, and themes. He spoke of a woman baking bread or searching for a coin, of building a tower or preparing for battle, of a hen caring for her chicks, and of a builder building on a strong foundation. He did not refrain from using statements such as “I have come not to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt. 10:34, NRSV) because they might portray or imply endorsement of military conquest, for example. Neither did he allow himself to be distracted from the main issue by trying to correct “wrong thinking” on side issues. Take for example the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant from long distance (Lk. 7:2-10). Jesus didn’t say to him, “You’re thinking in hierarchical terms when you say you’re a man under orders and you give orders to others. The universe doesn’t actually work that way.” No, instead Jesus said, “In all of Israel I have not seen such faith!” Or, as a more serious example, Jesus refused to be deflected by the woman at the well into a debate over the hot topic of Jewish-Samaritan relations and the proper place to worship (John 4).

The apostles and the early church continued to be incarnational, as Jesus was. It took a vision to accomplish it, but Peter finally realized that he did not have to force Gentiles to come to God on Jewish terms (Acts 10). Paul continued that practice in more explicit terms, becoming all things to all people that he might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:22). The Jerusalem Council observed what God was doing among the Gentiles and concluded that they ought not require Gentiles to become cultural Jews in order to be Christians.

The message men have been hearing today is that they must come to God on women’s terms; that to be Christian, they must become feminine. They must renounce concern for accomplishment or achievement, influence, power, position, etc. and focus instead on mutual support, nurture, sharing of feelings, etc. It that the message we really want to send? Though we may want men to open up to those feminine characteristics so that they might more fully experience life as God intends it to be, is that the place to begin? James Dittes says no:

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Position is used here not in the restrictive sense of organizational rank, but in terms of how men relate to one another socially. Deborah Tannen has pointed out that, while women use talk to make connection and build cooperation, men use talk to accomplish tasks and establish position. (c.f. D. Tannen, You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New York: Morrow, 1990.) Notice how men’s use of talk relates to achievement and hierarchical thinking? Hmm.
Some men (and some women) find it easy to suppose (and they may be right) that men would be better human beings if we were more like women. Because social wholeness requires the balance, blending, and equality between men and women that it does, it has been easy to surmise that wholeness requires a similar internal balance between male and female traits. (Sometimes anyone who resists such androgyny as a therapeutic formula is accused of resisting social justice.) This usually translates to making men more vulnerable," more "sensitive," more "expressive," more "relational," or to "getting in touch with the feminine within." That may be a good goal, but is not a good starting point.39

It is not a good starting point sociologically because in most cultures men are less free to cross gender lines than women.40 It places a greater burden on men than women and inevitably leads to a disparity of participation. It is also not a good starting point theologically. To begin at this point is to confuse the realm of prevenient grace with that of sanctifying grace. If we assume, as did Wesley, that the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of pre-Christian men and women, "gently wooing" them back to God, then it is logical to assume that the Spirit is also accommodating to them. Surely the Spirit, as did the Son, would speak to them in terms with which they could identify. Surely the Spirit would whisper echoes of Eden in their ears, recalling deep memories of the full image of God created in them, memories which would be consistent with their culture’s gender definitions and their own identification with those definitions. If this is true, would not God’s stated purpose to draw all people to Godself be better served by our cooperating with what the Spirit is doing, by presenting the gospel in language, images, illustrations, and themes with which they can identify?

Conclusion

Ironically, the results of the study described above indicate that if the church will place a strong emphasis on the masculine themes expressed in its statements, both men and women will feel included.41 If we will include these themes in our worship, our Christian education, our evangelistic services, and our personal conversations, we will find men and women responding in greater numbers. To illustrate, in September of 1995, Dorothy Cassel of Wesley United Methodist Church in El Reno,


41This is another confirmation that women are, indeed, more free to cross gender lines.
Oklahoma began attending a seminar led by the author. After the session dealing with the problem of the missing men, Ms. Cassel decided she would try to include as many of the masculine themes as possible in the next term of the *Experiencing God* class she taught at her church. She reports that in the two previous terms when she had taught the class, 12-15 people, 5-7 of whom were men, would come to the first session and that by the third session they had settled down to 12-15 in attendance with only 2 men involved. After preparing the first session for the third term, Ms. Cassel went through her lesson and inserted as many of the 10 masculine theme words (see Appendix 2) as she could appropriately use. She followed this practice for each session afterwards. Attendance at the first session was as before, 9 women and 6 men. Unlike the other terms, however, by the third session attendance had increased to 31, of which 18 were men. Consequently, she began using the same practice whenever she preached as a lay speaker in area churches. “I could not believe the difference,” she said. “Before hardly a single man would comment on my message. Now the men seek me out to tell me how much my message spoke to them. It really does make a difference.”

The inclusive language debate to this point has focused on those women within the Church who feel excluded by the use of male referent language. The evidence of the missing men and the research into why they are missing takes the issue of inclusive language far beyond male referent nouns and pronouns. By choosing to focus its message on primarily feminine themes the church has, as a matter of practical effect, excluded men from its ranks. The church is not, however, faced with a choice between excluding women or excluding men. While the church is addressing the legitimate concerns of feminist Christians, it can also emphasize themes with which both men and women identify, illustrating them with metaphors, analogies and illustrations drawn from both women’s and men’s experience, and calling them to response in both male- and female- appropriate ways. The inclusive language debate need not be a “heads I win, tails you lose” proposition, but one in which everybody wins, especially those who do not yet know Christ.

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42 Spontaneous comments offered by Ms. Cassel at an evangelism leaders’ training event conducted by the author in Hinton, Oklahoma, May 16, 1997.
APPENDIX 1

“Feminine” Christian Worldview Statements
(Numbers represent each statement’s order in the Conversational Perceptions Survey)

1. “Don't keep your worries, fears, and problems bottled up inside. We need to share our feelings with each other.” (Sharing feelings)

2. “You come to realize at some point that you are not in charge of your life.” (Submission)

4. “Nobody can go it alone. You have to learn to lean on other people to make it in this world.” (Community)

5. “You should always refuse to get into a fight. Even if there seems to be no way to avoid it, you should always ‘turn the other cheek.’” (Non-violence or Non-aggression)

8. “I'd like to support people, to nurture them so they can be all they want to be.” (Nurture)

10. “We all need forgiveness. I do. You do. It's the only way we can get a fresh start.” (Forgiveness)

11. “The greatest need we have is the need for love. You need to know you are loved and to love others.” (Love)

14. “It's important to humble. You should put other people first and think of them as better than you.” (Humility)

15. “Though it may mean having less money and prestige, serving others should be a person's central goal in life.” (Service)

17. “It's not so much what you do or accomplish that really matters. It's the kind of person you are.” (Becoming)
APPENDIX 2

“Masculine” Christian Worldview Statements
(Numbers represent each statement's order in the Conversational Perceptions Survey)

3. “I want to be somebody who makes a difference. I want to make the world a little better than it was.” (Influence)

6. “You've got to have somewhere to belong. You need a team you're a part of.” (Belonging)

7. “There's got to be a purpose in life—a plan you fit into.” (Purpose or Position)

9. I want to be known as a person with integrity. It's time we re-discovered the idea of honor.” (Character)

12. “At some point you've got to have the courage to stand up for what is right.” (Courage)

13. “There's something more asked of us than most of us realize. We are called to live on a higher plane than we do.” (Challenge)

16. “You have to try to live up you your potential. That's the only way life is worth living.” (Fulfillment)

18. “Some things you just have to do because they're your responsibility. If you don't, you let people you care about down.” (Responsibility or Duty)

19. “You have to be tough with yourself sometimes. It may hurt or it may be hard, but you just have to 'suck it up' and do it.” (Discipline or Perseverance)

20. “I want to be somebody who can find the strength to face any challenge.” (Strength or Power)