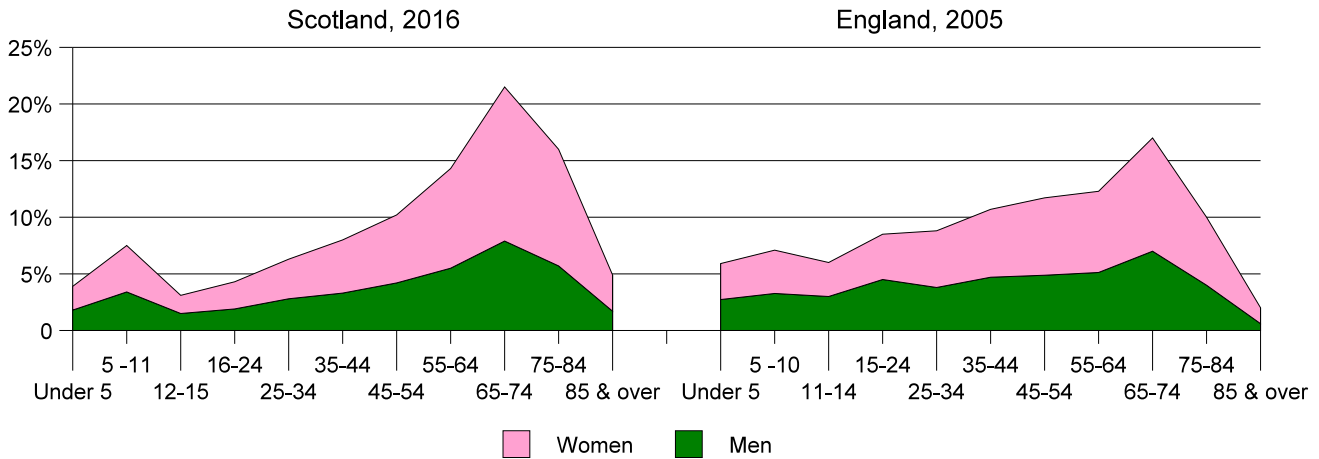


This piece is taken from Chapter 4 of the book *Does the Future have a Church?*

According to R T Kendall a sleeping person hates the sound of the alarm. What are the alarms sounding for the church both globally and in the UK? In two familiar short words, they can be summarised as “gender” and “age.” While it is easy to look at these two topics separately, it should be immediately noted that they are also linked together.

A simple example is given in the diagram below which shows the number of Scottish and English churchgoers by age and gender. Although the age-groups are different, the broad shape of each chart shows key differences between them. What is the major significance of such charts?

Figure 16.5.1: The Gender/Age Imbalance of Churchgoers in both Scotland and England



In both countries the profile of number of churchgoers is similar in that they both peak in the age-group 65 to 74, and in both countries at that peak age women more than outnumber the men. Women in fact outnumber the men in all age-groups in Scotland and in all bar the age-group 15-24 in England (although they are equal for 11-14). Why are there more women in church than men? This, the obvious question, is explored below.

Initially one asks why there are so many more both men and women coming to church when they are 65 to 74. The years for the two graphs are different, but in Scotland in 2016 those of this age were born between 1942 and 1951, thus seeing their teenage years in the 1950s and 1960s. In England this age-group was born between 1931 and 1940, seeing their teenage years in the 1940s and 1950s. Was there anything special in those decades which might have impacted churchgoing? Yes, there were the Billy Graham Crusades in Wembley in 1954 and 1955 and in Glasgow and other Scottish cities in 1955. He was also in both countries in 1961. In earlier year there were similar rallies by Tom Rees. All these saw literally scores of people converted and followed up, far more than were converted during more usual evangelistic endeavours. And most have stayed in church ever since! The only reason why the graphs drop in the 75 to 84 age-bands is that older people die, and this just shows natural mortality.

It will be noticed that the percentage of those aged 65 to 74 is much higher in Scotland than in England (22% to 17%), and the difference is largely among the women (14% to 10%). The greater proportion of women in church in Scotland is not just true for this age-group. Part of the difference, however, is because the numbers attending in England are much higher proportionately for those aged 11 to 55, so proportionately there are fewer older people, and the reason for that is the dramatic increase seen in English churches from the Pentecostal and New Churches movements, augmented by an enormous number of churchgoing immigrants. These have impacted England far more than in Scotland, although Scotland has seen similar movements.

**The Gender Problem**

The gender church imbalance is not only in the UK. Normally there are 106 men born for every 100 women, or 51 men for every 49 women; this ratio is endemic throughout the world, unless it is deliberately altered as by China’s “one child” policy when many female foetuses were aborted, skewing the ratio very severely. The same has happened in India because sons are preferred to daughters. These two large-population countries have shrunk the global ratio to 102 boys to 100 girls.<sup>1</sup>

The gender ratio in the English church in 2015 was 58 women to 42 men, a ratio which is only marginally changing since it was first measured in depth in 1979 at 56:44. It is forecast to be 59:41 by 2030. It was 60:40 in Scotland in 2016. In London in 2012 it was 56:44. Effectively this means there are three women for every two men in church, a ratio which causes any number of problems.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reference.com/world-view/ratio-men-women-world-population-5afd68eb596fbafb>

The book *7 Reasons your Church needs more Men*<sup>2</sup> highlights the consequences:

- A. *For men.* There is a need for more evangelism amongst men. Fewer men means fewer male friends for support and encouragement, especially as fathers with families. In an article by Rev Pat Reid, a Christian philanthropist,<sup>3</sup> he argued that a man in a Christian family acts as a provider, a protector, a preserver [for the family] and as a priest [to help them trust in God].
- B. *For women.* Many in their 20s or 30s find there are no single men of their age in church, so Christian women have to make a choice of foregoing marriage by remaining single, or marrying a non-Christian man and having a family, or by consulting a Christian or non-Christian dating agency. Not having children can make single women feel sad and lonely; half (46%) reported dealing with grief and a sense of loss.<sup>4</sup> Many also find it difficult to have a friendship with a man without everyone thinking it's a relationship.
- C. *For the church.* The consequences of having fewer Christian families is that (most likely) there are fewer children which leads to fewer young Christian people, and contributes to the decline of the church. What of those women who marry a non-Christian and have children – don't they come to church? Usually the answer is "No."
- D. *For dating and relationships.* Over half of Christian singles (54%) said they hadn't dated for at least a year.<sup>5</sup> Godly and honourable dating is not seen as often as it should, and what it means to "date" needs discussion in youth groups. Christian dating can be defined as "getting to know someone with a view to seeing whether or not we want to be in a non-sexual relationship" while being in a relationship can be defined as "getting to know someone with a view to seeing whether or not we want to get engaged."<sup>6</sup>
- E. *For marriage.* There are many resources relating to Christian marriage. There are also "mixed" marriages where one party is not Christian – there are more Christian women married to a non-Christian man than the other way round (23% to 13%). Only two-thirds, 66%, of mixed couples said they were "happy" in their marriage, whereas 90% said so when both were Christian.<sup>7</sup> With fewer Christian men in the church there is less Christian fathering, and spiritual fatherlessness is especially important as support is less and role-models are fewer. A Church of England survey found that only 28% of Anglicans felt that transmission of faith was important.<sup>8</sup> A large One Hope global survey found that "family-life is one of the biggest influences of teen behaviour. Regardless of the family make-up, it is the degree of positive family experience that determines positive outcomes."<sup>9</sup>
- F. *For parenting and young people.* "Quality relationships are central to successful faith transmission," wrote Olwyn Mark in an article in *Transmission*.<sup>10</sup> What are the factors important in that process? At least the following:
- Children feeling close to their parents, especially the father, and growing up in a warm family.
  - Children seeing their parents have an authentic (not perfect) faith.
  - Parents seeking to develop and nurture their children's faith.
  - Children receiving multi-generational input from wider family and church.
- G. *For the future.* The biological replacement rate of committed Christians has been found to be 50%. The authors of *7 Reasons* estimate "that only about 16% of today's church grand-children will have two Christian parents," whereas a survey in 1992 found it was 60%.<sup>11</sup> Their reasoning was as follows:
- Out of 100 Christians, only 80% marry a Christian
  - Of these 80% only 40% will have 2 Christian parents
  - Only 32% of these will marry a Christian
  - Of these only 16% of grandchildren will have 2 Christian parents
  - Only 6.5% of great grandchildren will have 2 Christian parents
  - Only 5% of these will marry a Christian.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *7 Reasons your Church needs more Men*, by Annabel Clarke and Nathan Blackaby, published by the Engage Network in 2018, ISBN 978-1-9734470-1-6.

<sup>3</sup> "Man, the Endangered Species?," Rev Pat Reid, *Keep the Faith*, Issue 109, June 2019, Page 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Singleness in the UK Church*, D J Pullinger, 2014, <https://www.singlefriendlychurch.co.uk>

<sup>6</sup> *Op cit*, Footnote 145, *7 Reasons*, Pages 15,16.

<sup>7</sup> Article "Why your church needs more men" by Annabel Clarke and Nathan Blackaby in *Christianity*, June 2019, Page49.

<sup>8</sup> *From Anecdote to Evidence*, Church Growth Research Programme, Church of England, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> *Spiritual State of the World's Children*, <http://onehope.net/research/>, released March, 2015, Page 6. High media exposure was the most negative experience.

<sup>10</sup> Article "Passing on faith in the home" in *Transmission*, Bible Society, Spring 2017, Page 23

<sup>11</sup> *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, Peter Brierley, MARC, 1993; *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> *Op cit*, Footnote 145, *7 Reasons*, Pages 18 and 19.

*The Gender Alarm*

What are the actual numbers of churchgoers by gender and denomination? These are given in Table 13.8.1 and for England and in Table 13.7.2 for Scotland, so are not repeated here.

These Tables show the extent of the alarm about gender. If the trends prove to be correct then over the 30 years 2000 to 2030, male churchgoers will decline faster than female churchgoers (-34% to -30%), and there are already too few men! The difference is particularly acute for the Anglicans in England (a difference of 7%), Baptists (9%), Roman Catholics (8%), Independents (11%), and the Smaller Denominations (13%). In the growing denominations, women outpace men substantially – +75% to +62% for the Orthodox and +105% to +79% for Pentecostals.

Table 13.8.2 basically says that the problem of too few men will become worse as time goes on. Is there any corroborating evidence that more women are joining the church than men? The answer is YES. For example, in the churches of Greater London, attendance between 2005 and 2012 increased by a total of 98,500 people (from 623,000 to 721,500). Of this 98,500 people 80,600 were women, 82%, and 17,900 were men<sup>13</sup> – 4.5 women for every 1.0 man! Why didn't more men join the churchgoing rush in London? The numbers include black people starting going to church as well as white!

The Tables show that the percentage of men attending church worsens across every single denominational group, except for the Orthodox and Pentecostals. Of the declining denominations, the one that changes least is the New Churches, most of which strictly practice "Male-only" leadership.

Table 13.7.2 gives equivalent data for Scottish church attenders. The results are very similar, a loss of both genders across all denominations except for the Pentecostals, but this time with women leaving faster than men. Scottish loss is occurring at twice the rate of English loss and, as with England, doing so slightly faster in the 2020 to 2030 decade than previously.

The above comments all focus on there being too few men, but if there is an abundance of women this is likely to mean the increasing opportunity for women leaders in the church (see Figure 0.2.2), and not just in the UK, but in the church worldwide. Women ministers are now commonplace, and so are women bishops. The Pope may even allow married priests to serve in some of the remote parts of the Amazonian jungles! This is due to a drastic shortage; the issue was debated in the October 2019 Amazon Synod,<sup>14</sup> and discussions are ongoing.

<sup>13</sup> Op cit., *Capital Growth*, Footnote 82, Table A.5 on Page 152.

<sup>14</sup> Article in *The Week*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2019, Page 8.