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REACTIONS TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY

A Survey of English Baptist Church Members

The feminist movement which gained so much notoriety in the 1960s has influenced a variety of institutions. Now, some twenty years later, it has influenced our assumptions about our families, about who is supposed to do various kinds of work, involvement in the political process, the structure of formal education, and many other areas. While the events associated with this impact do not make the headlines as often today as they once did, with the obvious exception of women's involvement in the peace movement, the influence is still being felt.

The feminist movement has also had an impact on religion. It has long been recognized that religious institutions are among the slowest to change. Nevertheless, as new assumptions about appropriate roles of men and women have gained acceptance, some of these changes have spilled over into the churches. This paper seeks to deal with one aspect of these changes: the entry of women into the ordained ministry and the reactions of lay church members to them.

To date the picture we have of the feminist movement in the churches is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the movement of women into the ministry has been continuously reported in the media as controversial. Especially in the Church of England, the negotiations associated with this issue have involved intense internal political intrigue and manoeuvring. On the other hand, few lay persons seem to know a great deal about the debates, and even fewer seem to have thought seriously about the idea of having a woman specifically as their pastor. Each time the idea comes up in the context of a congregation searching for a new pastoral leadership, the reaction among the members is virtually always one of surprise, confusion and resentment.

The picture is also paradoxical in terms of the literature available which deals with the entry of women into ministry. The discussions produced by various religious presses include biblical treatises, theological discourses, and ethical discussions, all of which have been highly polemical in tone. But there have been no systematic studies of an empirical nature concerning just what changes are in fact taking place and just how church members are actually dealing with the problem. In short we have a great deal 'more heat than light'. One thing that was needed was a systematic evaluation of the ways in which lay church members think and feel about the entry of women into the ranks of ordained clergy. This paper seeks to report the results of such a study.

An Empirical Study of Lay Attitudes

During the academic year 1983-84, the author conducted a nationwide survey of lay church members in England. Four denominations participated in the study: the Baptist Union, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church. The focus of the survey was the range of attitudes of lay church members towards the entry of women into the ordained ministry. One goal of the study was to obtain a sample of church members which would be representative of the entire nation. This was accomplished by means of

probability sampling techniques. The sample was drawn in two stages. First, a systematic sample of churches was drawn from the yearbooks of each denomination involved. We drew equal numbers of churches in the three main cultural regions of the country. i.e., the North, the Midlands and the South. Second, we telephoned the pastors of these churches and asked them to draw names from their membership lists in a specific way. The goal was to obtain lists of approximately 400 members in each of the four denominations.

The overall level of co-operation was very high. Better than 95% of the pastors co-operated and drew the list of lay members as specified. They also supplied basic information about their congregations. The level of co-operation among the lay church members was also very high. Table 1 portrays the numbers of members involved in each denomination. The overall response rate to the survey itself was about 91%. The figure for English Baptists was 92%. The regional distribution of the sample conformed almost exactly to the target figures. All told we can place a great deal of confidence in the representativeness of the sample which was ultimately drawn.

Data were collected by means of a mailed questionnaire. Late in January 1984, we mailed a copy of the data collection instrument to each church member in the sample. Two weeks after the initial mailing, we sent a follow-up post card to respondents from whom we had not heard. We made a third and final contact one month after the initial mailing in the form of another complete packet of materials. (Any questions concerning additional details of the research procedures should be directed to the author by mail).

1: SAMPLE SIZE AND RATE OF RESPONSE FROM A SURVEY OF LAY CHURCH MEMBERS IN FOUR DENOMINATIONS IN ENGLAND

Denomination	Target Sample	Number of Returns	Percent
Church of England	400	347	87
Baptist Union	392	360	92
Methodist Church	390	349	89
United Reformed Church	375	358	95
TOTAL	1557	1414	91

Regional distribution of sample:	North	32%
	Midlands	35%
	South	33%

Lay Perceptions of Clergywomen

Social-psychological studies of attitudes have shown fairly conclusively that attitudes are very complex. They often involve many dimensions. This report deals with two such aspects of attitudes: (1) the 'cognitive' dimension and (2) the 'affective' or 'feeling' dimension.

The cognitive or perceptual dimension involves people's understandings of what the object of the attitude is like. It is a matter of 'head stuff'. It involves what people 'think'. In the case of lay church members' attitudes towards women in ministry, this is a matter of their understanding of 'what clergywomen are like'.

We approached this dimension of the members' attitudes toward clergywomen by examining the extent to which their images of women in ministry tended to take the form of stereotypes. As women have moved into various professions formerly dominated by men, they have typically encountered an identifiable set of stereotyped responses to them. The same stereotypes tend to appear in relation to women entering a variety of professions such as medicine, law, and higher education. In general these stereotypes portray women as unreliable workers, overly emotional, unable to handle interpersonal conflict, etc.

Table 2 contains a listing of the questions that we used for this purpose. The members were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought each statement listed was 'true' or 'correct'. Table 2 also contains the percentages of church members responding to each question in various ways.

Several patterns are apparent in the table. First, it is clear that there is wide disagreement in the responses to each question. Regardless of which stereotype is involved, some church members tend to view clergywomen in a stereotyped way, while others do not. Secondly, some stereotypes appear to be held more widely than others. For example, very few members see clergywomen as likely to change jobs very often. At the other extreme, a large proportion of members view women as temperamentally unfit for the pastorate and as subject to emotional problems because of the cross-pressures of demands from work and home. Slightly more than half of the members view women as basically weak church leaders. Thirdly, nevertheless, on a majority of the stereotyping items, it is but a minority of church members who view women in ministry in such stereotyped terms. Most church members tend to have more open and positive perceptions of women in the role of ordained clergy.

Subdimensions of Stereotyping

The next question we asked about these items was the extent to which church members answered each question in complete isolation from the others, or whether they answered clusters of questions similarly. A statistical procedure that enables us to inquire about this is called 'factor analysis'. This approach allows us to compare the ways in which people answered each question, and then to identify subsets of questions which members seemed to answer in similar ways. By examining subsets of questions that appear to have been answered in the same way, we have an opportunity to check whether those sets of questions have anything in common and thus to identify different themes or dimensions of stereotyping itself.

Table 3 contains the results of doing a factor analysis on the stereotyping questions. The results indicate that members tended to deal with each of these questions in terms of two basic underlying dimensions. The first and clearest dimension is that of 'role conflict'. That is, there is a subset of items which deal with members' perceptions of whether clergywomen can handle the cross-pressures of job and home. Among the total set of questions, the dominant concern clearly appears to have been this kind of issue - can the woman handle these cross-pressures?

The second dimension contained a subset of questions which have in common the concept of general 'reliability'. These items clearly

2: PERCENT OF ENGLISH BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS AGREEING AND DISAGREEING WITH STEREOTYPED STATEMENTS ABOUT WOMEN IN MINISTRY

	definitely true	probably true	probably false	definitely false
*A woman minister who is married can fulfil her responsibilities as wife and mother just as well as if she were not working full time	13	35	27	25
Women ministers are likely to have higher levels of absenteeism from work than men	6	35	37	22
Women ministers are likely to change pastorates more often than men	0	16	57	27
Being divorced would impair the ministry of a woman more than of a man	13	28	26	33
Women who try to be both full-time ministers and also wives and mothers are likely to have emotional problems due to all the demands placed on them	22	53	18	7
The children of women who are full-time ministers are likely to have personal problems due to lack of care and attention	7	33	36	24
Most churches today need the strong leadership that a man is better able to give	28	26	21	25
*A woman's temperament is just as suited for the pastoral ministry as is a man's	41	37	13	8
A woman minister who openly questions the traditional male language about God will alienate many members of her church	24	46	26	5

*Agreement with this item indicates the nonstereotyped response.
 Agreement with the other items indicates the stereotyped response.

3: DIMENSIONS OF STEREOTYPING WOMEN IN MINISTRY AMONG BAPTIST LAY CHURCH MEMBERS IN ENGLAND

	Cluster on Factor #1	Cluster on Factor #2
'Role Conflict Dimension'*		
cannot handle home/work conflicts	.72	.03
children will be maladjusted	.67	.32
will have emotional problems	.58	.38
temperament not suited for pastorate	.46	.22
'General Reliability Dimension'		
divorce less acceptable for a woman	.05	.65
women are weak leaders	.45	.52
women likely to change pastorates	.22	.51
women high in absenteeism	.30	.41

*accounts for 83% of the explained variance

4: PERCENTAGE OF ENGLISH BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS INDICATING PREFERENCES FOR MEN OR WOMEN IN SELECTED CHURCH ROLES

	prefer a man	no difference	prefer a woman
I. CHURCH POSITIONS			
senior or sole pastor	57	43	0
assistant pastor	28	67	5
denominational administrator	24	75	1
foreign missionary	7	87	6
college chaplain	51	49	0
II. PASTORAL ACTIVITIES			
performing a baptism	52	47	0
administering the Lord's Supper	35	65	0
preaching a sermon	29	71	0
conducting a funeral	44	56	0
advising you about a personal problem	28	60	12
conducting a business meeting of the church	36	63	1
guiding the church in a building programme	56	43	1
planning the congregation's annual budget	24	73	3
coordinate church staff as senior minister	46	53	1
performing a wedding	52	48	0
reading the scripture lesson during worship	6	91	3
leading a pastoral prayer	9	90	2

tended to cluster together. But as an underlying dimension, the 'general reliability' theme was less clearly manifest than the 'role conflict' ethos.

The importance of this mode of analysis is two-fold: (1) it demonstrates clearly that church members tend to apply underlying criteria to questions of this sort, i.e., they do not answer the questions in isolation, and (2) it demonstrates that among Baptist lay people the issue of whether the clergywoman will be a reliable church worker is less important to them than whether or not she can handle the conflicts associated with being a wife, mother, and professional church worker.

Preferences for Men or Women in Church Roles

The second general component of attitudes which the survey addressed is the 'affective' dimension. This second dimension focuses not on what people think but what they 'feel'. It is less a matter of 'head stuff', and more a matter of 'gut reaction'. In terms of clergywomen, the second dimension focuses not on what church members think of women in ministry, but rather more on their feelings about the idea.

We addressed this dimension of attitudes towards women in ministry by asking the church members about their preferences for men or women in a variety of church positions and functions. These items are listed in Table 4. For each position and activity on the list, the members were asked to indicate whether they preferred a man for that role, preferred a woman in it, or if it really made no difference to them. Thus the items give us an indication of what church members 'want' in terms of the gender of the person in a variety of clergy roles.

As was the case with the stereotyping questions, a number of patterns are observable in the table. First, the basic dividing line in most church members' minds appears to be between preferring a man on the one hand and the gender of the person making no difference on the other. Very few people indicated that they actually prefer a woman for any of these roles. The major exception to this has to do with the identity of the person from whom one might receive advice about a personal problem. More people indicated a preference for a woman on that question than any of the others. However, it is clear that most of these people are themselves women, and this pattern is thus understandable. (Since more than half of the respondents were women, one might ask legitimately why the number indicating a preference for a woman was not greater).

Secondly, it is instructive to examine the specific issues on which the most church members indicated that it made no difference whether the functionary was male or female. These items are those dealing with reading the scripture lesson during worship, leading a pastoral prayer, and to a slightly lesser extent, being a denominational administrator, the one preaching a sermon, assistant pastor, or the one administering the Lord's Supper.

At the opposite extreme, the questions on which the members indicated the clearest preference for a man included the position of senior or sole pastor and the identity of a person guiding the church in a building programme.

The majority of church members tended to indicate that it made no difference whether the minister was a man or a woman in relation to most of these positions and activities.

Dimensions of Gender Preference

We subjected the members' answers to these preference questions to a factor analysis in the same way as we analyzed the stereotyping questions above. Table 5 shows the results of this test. The factor analysis indicated that there were basically four dimensions of gender preference operating in the responses to these items.

The first and dominant dimension may be called a 'sacramental' dimension. That is, the questions which clustered together as the first and dominant factor included items which were largely sacramental or liturgical in nature. What this indicates is that the overriding concern in the minds of lay church members as they articulate preferences for men or women in clergy roles is the effect such women may have on the sacramental and liturgical life of the church.

The subdimension which emerged second in order of importance is the 'organizational' dimension. The items which clustered together on this component tend to be questions dealing with issues associated with running the organizational machinery of the congregation and the churches. In the minds of lay church members, their preferences for men or women for these activities are a 'different matter' from their preferences concerning liturgical roles.

The third dimension may be seen as a possible exception to the statement immediately above. That is, two items which are clearly liturgical in nature did not cluster with the first dimension but rather constituted a third factor in and of themselves. These two items are reading scripture and leading prayer during worship services. I have chosen to call these the 'lay liturgy dimension'.

The fourth and final factor is noteworthy, because it contains the position of senior or sole pastor. That item, combined with the question of the chaplaincy, constitutes the fourth dimension to come out of the factor analysis. I have chosen to label it the 'official authority' dimension, because of the presence of the senior pastor item and because of the few other questions which actually were correlated with it fairly highly. The position of 'staff coordinator' actually placed fairly strongly on this fourth factor (see Table 5), as did the position of 'denominational administrator', 'running a business meeting', and 'performing a baptism'. Most of these items also share the property of 'church authority'. What this pattern indicates is that, while the sacramental and organizational criteria for preferring men or women in various roles were obviously clearer and more primary in the minds of the lay members, their preference for a man or a woman in a position of authority – especially that of pastor – is again 'another matter'. The authority component stands out as a separate issue from the others. While it is not primary in the minds of the members, it is sufficiently important to stand relatively alone.

Willingness to Accept a Woman

At another point on the questionnaire, the church members in the survey were asked whether they thought the members of their church would accept a qualified woman minister if she had been recommended

to the congregation by the deacons. About 58% of the members indicated that they thought others in their congregation would accept such a person. We then asked them whether they, themselves, would be willing to accept such a woman. Fully 74% indicated 'yes'. If a woman were recommended to the congregation by the deacons, about three-fourths of the laypersons were prepared to accept the idea.

This item was as close as we could get to a question about what members would actually do. How would they act? Would they accept the recommendation of a woman or not? Clearly most members would respond positively.

5: DIMENSIONS OF PREFERENCES FOR MEN OR WOMEN IN MINISTERIAL ROLES AMONG BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS IN ENGLAND

	factor #1	factor #2	factor #3	factor #4
'Sacramental Dimension'				
funerals	.82	.24	.05	.14
weddings	.71	.22	.05	.27
Lord's Supper	.67	.33	.21	.18
baptism	.67	.15	.12	.31
(preaching)	.43	.40	.30	.27
'Organizational Dimension'				
budget	.15	.72	.10	.07
business meeting	.31	.65	.11	.31
building programme	.25	.46	.04	.24
denominational administrator	.16	.44	.17	.33
counselling	.15	.34	.19	.18
(staff coordinator)	.31	.48	.11	.46
'Lay Liturgy Dimension'				
read scripture	.04	.13	.90	.01
lead prayer	.15	.21	.68	.14
'Official Authority Dimension'				
pastor	.43	.10	.13	.72
chaplain	.36	.26	.01	.48

Comparisons with Other Denominations

With these patterns of receptivity amongst Baptist laypersons now before us, it is interesting to note how Baptist church members compare with members of other denominations participating in the study. Table 6 contains such comparisons for several dimensions of receptivity discussed above. Examination of the percentages in the table indicates several patterns in the responses. First, the denomination whose members tend to be the most resistant to women in ministry is the Church of England. These persons tend to stereotype clergywomen the most, to prefer men in ministerial roles the most, and to be willing to accept a woman as priest the least. At the other extreme, members of United Reformed congregations tend to be the most receptive.

6: COMPARISON OF BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS WITH MEMBERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS ON SELECTED INDICATORS OF RECEPTIVITY TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY

	Anglican	Baptist	Methodist	URC
Percent willing to accept a qualified woman minister as pastor	61	74	93	92
Percent saying a woman minister can handle cross pressures of job and home*	54	48	60	67
Percent saying clergywomen who are also wives and mothers are not likely to have emotional problems**	29	24	27	36
Percent saying a woman's temperament is equally well suited for pastoral ministry*	76	79	89	89
Percent saying women equally able to provide strong church leadership**	44	45	66	64
Percent not preferring a man for senior pastor or parish priest#	38	43	58	65 ·
Percent not preferring a man for assistant pastor #	63	73	90	88
Percent not preferring a man for administering the Lord's Supper#	51	65	77	80
Percent not preferring a man for preaching a sermon#	73	71	84	86
Percent not preferring a man for conducting a business meeting of the church#	71	64	77	81

*responding either 'definitely' or 'probably' true
**responding either 'definitely' or 'probably' so
#responding either 'no difference' or 'prefer a woman'

Second, the members of the four denominations tend to cluster into two groupings of two denominations each in terms of liberal/conservative tendencies. The Baptists tend to resemble the Anglicans in level of receptivity, whilst the Methodists compare favourably to the URC members. The Anglicans and Baptists constitute the more resistant denominations, and the Methodists and URC members comprise the more receptive bodies. There are greater differences in response patterns between these groupings than within them.

Patterns of Receptivity: Conclusions

The analysis of the survey data to this point will support the following generalizations:

1. Church members are highly divided in their perceptions of women in ministry.

2. The main criterion underlying these differences in tendency to stereotype clergywomen appears to be whether women in ministry can handle the role conflicts associated with being working wives and mothers.

3. Lay church members differ widely in the extent to which they actually prefer a man in a variety of church positions and activities.

4. Church members' preferences for men or women in clergy roles are not monolithic.

5. To some extent, regardless of members' tendencies to stereotype women or to prefer a man in clergy roles, nearly three-fourths of the members indicated that in an appropriate search for pastoral leadership they would accept a qualified woman as pastor if she were recommended to the congregation by the deacons.

6. Baptist laypersons tend to resemble the Anglicans in their relatively conservative response to women in ministry, while the Methodists and URC members resemble each other in their greater willingness to accept women as ordained clergy.

Factors Related to Acceptance of Women

The concluding section of this report focuses on explaining the differences in receptivity to women in ministry that we have described so far. The question now concerns why members differ in these ways. Is there any way in which we can identify church members who are more or less favourably disposed to the idea of women in the ministry? One approach to answering this kind of question is to compare the members' levels of receptivity to clergywomen with other characteristics that they manifest. We shall use that approach in the remainder of this report.

Demographic Correlates

A number of observers (see for example, Allport, 1958) of various forms of prejudice in western society have noted that certain types of individuals are more or less predisposed toward prejudiced responses to others. With regard to 'sexism', the first of these correlates has to do with the sex of the respondent. As concerns sexism in general, other research (e.g., Dempewolff, 1974) has indicated that males tend

7: PERCENTAGE OF ENGLISH BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS INDICATING THEY WOULD ACCEPT A WOMAN AS PASTOR, COMPARED TO SELECTED INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

demographic traits		religiosity					
By sex:	males = 69 females = 78	By: church attendance	nearly every week = 73 once/twice a month = 100 few times per year = 100 rarely/never = 100				
By marital status: (ns)*	single = 80 married = 73 widowed = 74 sep/div = 57	frequency of saying grace	daily = 62 weekly = 72 special occasions = 82				
By age:	younger = more opposed older = more receptive (correlation = .20)	never = 89		RO=1#	RO=2	RO=3	RO=4
		religious ideology	Importance of:				
			worshipping community	74	69	91	100 (ns)
By formal education: (ns)*	Less than 'O' = 76 'O' levels = 74 6th form, no 'A' = 85 'A' levels = 73 univ. or polyt. = 67 post grad. = 68		helping individuals traditional evangelism social reform	90 66 0	81 69 100	67 79 89	86 93 71
			#RO stands for 'rank-order'				
By type of occupation:	unstable = 88 unskilled blue collar = 81 skilled blue collar = 79 clerical/sales = 68 lo prof/mgrl = 72 hi prof/mgrl = 73						
By family income: (in thousands of pounds)	under £3000 = 80 £3 - £6 = 81 £6 - £9 = 67 £9 - £12 = 70 £12 - £15 = 58 over £15 = 67		*'ns' indicates statistically non-significant differences				

to be more prejudiced than females. Analysis of these data indicates a similar pattern. As shown in Table 7, more females indicated a willingness to accept a woman as pastor than did males.

The second possible correlate concerns chronological age. In a number of previous studies (Lehman, 1981a; 1985a), prejudice and discrimination has been found to be characteristic more of older people than of younger ones. Such is not the case in our data from Baptist church members, however. The analysis of these data indicate that older church members tend to be more receptive than younger ones. This is a departure from the pattern that is typically found. (At this point we do not know why this pattern emerged.)

The third factor that is commonly taken into account is social class (Carroll, et al., 1983; Lehman, 1979; 1985a). Most of the time in survey research social class is indicated by the respondents' education, occupation, and income. The survey questionnaire included questions dealing with those concepts. When we compare those answers to the answers on the question of whether or not they will accept the clergywomen, the results tend not to support patterns found in other research. That is, people in occupations characterized by a *low* degree of skill, power, and autonomy tend to be more accepting of women in ministry than those in high status occupations. The differences are not great, but they are real. The same pattern applies to family income. Members in families with *low* incomes tend to be more receptive of women in ministry than those from families with high incomes. The results involving differences in formal education were inconclusive. That is, there was no clear indication that differences in formal education were predictive of differences in receptivity toward women in ministry.

We also asked the respondents about their marital status. This factor, like education, turned out to be unrelated to differences in attitude toward clergywomen.

Differences in Religious Commitment

Another possible factor determining attitudes toward women in the ministry is individual religiosity. We are talking, after all, about attitudes toward 'religious' leaders. There has also been a good deal of theological discourse on the issue. Do these data indicate that the religious factor makes any difference?

Table 7 also contains the results of comparing differences in willingness to accept woman as pastor and three indicators of differences in individual religious commitment. They are church attendance, frequency of praying at meals, and religious ideology. The measure of church attendance was highly skewed. That is, the survey turned up relatively few cases of low ritual involvement in church. Nevertheless, even those skewed patterns appear to be related to differences in receptivity to clergywomen. Members who report attending church every week were less inclined to accept a woman as pastor than people who tend to attend church less frequently. In this case, degree of religious involvement is negatively related to acceptance of women in ministry. The more often people go to church, the less receptive they are to clergywomen.

A similar pattern emerged in the analysis of frequency of saying grace. As shown in Table 7, the more frequently people prayed at

meals, the less likely they were to report accepting women as pastor.
Combining this pattern with that involving church attendance (above),
the picture emerges in which the more traditionally religious the
member is, the less likely that person is to accept a woman as pastor.
There appears to be something about traditional religious involvement
that does not mix well with acceptance of clergywomen.

The third aspect of religious commitment that we looked at was
religious ideology. The indicator of these differences was a set of
questions which asked the church member to indicate which of four
possible basic purposes of the church they thought was the most
important (see Table 7). They then were asked to indicate which of
the remaining three was next in importance, then the next, and finally
the least important. That is, we asked each member to rank-order four
possible purposes of the church.

The results of this analysis indicate that the relative ranking of
three of the four purposes of the church is predictive of receptivity
towards women in ministry. People who ranked traditional evangelism
high in importance tended to oppose women in ministry. On the other
hand, people who ranked social reform high as a purpose of the
church tended to accept women as pastors. People who viewed the
church as working to help individuals who cannot help themselves also
tended to be more in favor of clergywomen than those who thought
this was not important for the church to be doing. The extent to
which the church as the worshipping community was considered
important turned out to be unrelated to receptivity to clergywomen.
Even though the worshipping community was listed as the most
important purpose of the church by more people than anything else,
this emphasis turned out to be not predictive of receptivity toward
clergywomen. (Perhaps this purpose of the church is so commonplace
as to be taken for granted and of little predictive utility.)

We also asked the lay members whether they had ever known a
woman minister. We thought perhaps those who had known a woman in
the role of clergy would be more receptive to the idea than those who
had not had such an experience. The data in Table 8, however,
indicate that such is not the case. There were no statistically
significant differences in receptivity between those who had known a
woman minister and those who had not. (See Lehman, 1985a, for other
evidence and discussion of this point).

Church Characteristics

The next approach was to think not in terms of individual differences
but rather in terms of differences between types of congregations. The
question was whether people in one type of church would be more
inclined to accept a woman as pastor than those in another type of
congregation. The data in Table 8 indicate that such is indeed the
case. The first such factor is community size. Members from churches
located in large cities tend to be less willing to accept a woman as
pastor than those whose congregations are located in smaller places.

Size of congregation itself also turned out to be predictive of
attitudinal differences. Members of small congregations tended to be
more willing to accept a woman as pastor than members of large
churches. This pattern applied especially to members of very small
churches.

8: PERCENTAGE OF ENGLISH BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS SAYING THEY WOULD ACCEPT A WOMAN PASTOR, COMPARED TO DIRECT CONTACT, CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS, AND PERCEIVED TENSION

By contact

Ever known a woman minister?	yes = 74
(ns)*	no = 72

By Church Characteristics:

Community size:	Large city	= 63
	Small city	= 80
	Small town	= 78
	Village/rural	= 80
Size of congregation:	200 – 500	= 63
	100 – 199	= 61
	50 – 99	= 79
	25 – 49	= 75
	less than 25	= 93
Membership trend:	Growing faster than community	= 54
	Growing, but not that fast	= 71
	Holding its own	= 77
	Declining	= 90
Budget trend:	Increasing faster than inflation	= 68
	Keeping up with inflation	= 74
	Declining re: inflation	= 85
Region of the country:	North	= 68
	Midlands	= 81
	South	= 73

By perceived tension:

Would woman candidate created tension?	yes = 55	
	no = 96	
How concerned over tension?	very	= 68
	slightly	= 87
	not very	= 83
	not at all	= 90

*'ns' indicates statistically <u>non</u>-significant differences

The next factor concerned not absolute size but rather the trend in size of churches. Would it make any difference whether a church was growing or declining? Again, the data in Table 8 indicate that the membership trend of the congregation is indeed predictive of receptivity to women in ministry. Members of declining churches tend to be more willing to accept a woman as pastor than members of stable and growing churches. The same pattern applies to trends in the budget. Members of churches whose budgets are declining were more inclined to accept a woman as pastor than those in churches which were prospering.

There were also some differences in receptivity with regard to the regional location of the church. Members of churches located in the Midlands tended to be the most receptive of women in ministry. Members of churches located in the North were the least willing to accept a woman as 'pastor. Evidently there is something in these regional subcultures which relates to these kinds of attitudinal differences.

Finally, we wanted to know whether the way in which members expected others to react to women in ministry would be predictive of their own response. Other research in the United States (Carroll, et al., 1983; Lehman, 1981b; 1985a) has indicated that where the introduction of a woman is expected to introduce controversy and perhaps result in schism, receptivity to women as pastor is lower than where the member does not expect those consequences.

These patterns also emerged in this study (see Table 8). Members who thought a woman candidate would create tension in their congregations were far less likely to indicate acceptance of a woman as pastor than those who did not expect such tensions. The data in Table 8 also indicate that the more members were concerned about such tensions, the more likely they were to oppose having a woman as pastor.

Composite Portraits

From this list of correlates, we are now in a position to extract a 'composite portrait' of the church member who is likely to accept a woman as pastor and the one who is not. The member who is likely to accept readily a woman as pastor is an older female whose family has relatively little income and whose members work in occupations involving little skill and prestige. She does not attend church as often as many of her neighbors, and she does not say grace at meals very often either. She does not think much of traditional evangelism. Instead she thinks the churches ought to be heavily involved in helping those who cannot help themselves and in trying to reform the structures of society. She is a member of a church located in a rather small community. Her congregation also tends to be rather small and has been struggling for some time. It tends to be in a pattern of losing members and declining financial resources. The church is located in the Midlands. She does not think that the introduction of a woman's name as a candidate in her congregation would create much tension, and she would not be unduly concerned even if it did.

By contrast the member who is likely to oppose women in ministry is a younger male who earns a fairly high income by working in a relatively high status occupation. He attends church quite often and says grace before most meals. He thinks the church should be heavily involved in evangelism, but he does not think much of programmes of social reform or helping the helpless. His church is located in a large city, and his congregation is quite large. It has been growing in relation to the community and its budget has been at least keeping up with inflation over the last several years. His church is located in the North. He is convinced that if a woman were introduced as a candidate for the pastorate of his church, it would create a great deal of tension in the congregation. This tension would make him very concerned about the future of the local church.

Predicting Other Dimensions of Receptivity

Analysis of the survey data indicated that these same correlates of 'accepting a woman as pastor' tended also to be predictive of differences in stereotyping and preferences for men in clergy roles. With minor exceptions here and there, the same factors as those listed above tended to predict differences in stereotyping and in gender preferences for clergy roles. (Individuals wishing a detailed report of these patterns may obtain it by contacting the author.)

The Importance of Organizational Threat

Some of the patterns described above make sense when viewed from the perspective of the fact that churches are fragile voluntary organizations. In most instances they are not able to coerce their members into compliance with the wishes of leaders. Instead members of congregations must be persuaded and cajoled into accepting structural and cultural innovations. The introduction of women into the ordained ministry is clearly such an innovation, and it is equally clear that it has the potential for generating controversy.

This pattern is especially evident in relation to the church characteristics which are associated with receptivity to clergywomen. Acceptance of women in ministry is associated with being in a small congregation whose membership roles and budgets are steadily shrinking and which is located away from the bustling and interesting large city. Why are members in this kind of church more prepared to accept a woman as pastor? One answer is ·clear. *They have to*. Members of small struggling churches do not have the organizational or financial resources with which to be choosy about pastoral leadership. They are in no position to complain. They must take what comes along. When the choice before them is between having either 'no pastor at all' or a 'poorly qualified pastor' on the one hand, and taking a non-traditional pastor such as a woman on the other, the choice becomes clear. They would rather have the qualified woman than the alternative.

This pattern exists because most church members will do almost anything to keep from having to close their church doors. Most members love the little communities of which they are a part and will work hard to keep them going. They will 'even take a woman'.

The same variable accounts for the relationships involving perception of tension in the congregation. Members who perceive a woman's candidacy as creating tension tend· to prefer not to have a woman. The more this tension gives them concern about the future of their congregation, the less likely they are to accept a woman as pastor. The factor which lay beneath this set of responses is the same – concern for the viability of the congregation. If the congregation appears to be threatened by a change, members prefer to avoid that change. If the change is not threatening, even though it may be counter-attitudinal, they are more likely to accept it.

A similar interpretation may be placed on some of the ways in which religious commitment was related to acceptance of a woman as pastor. The more personal investment they have in their religious life, the less likely they are to be willing to risk change which could be disruptive of familiar patterns.

These patterns very closely resemble similar relationships observed among church members in the United States (Carroll, et al., 1983; Lehman, 1981b; 1985a). The more committed members were to their congregation, the less likely they were to be willing to accept a woman as pastor. The more their congregation was stable or growing, the less need they had to take innovation seriously, and the more they tended to oppose accepting a woman as pastor. Thus in two different societies involving the same denomination, very similar patterns have emerged. It appears that the factor of organizational concerns is a very important one concerning reactions to similar issues in both societies. If ways of addressing these organizational concerns cannot be developed, it may become difficult to get lay church members to accept innovations such as the introduction of women into the pastoral ministry, no matter how well those changes are buttressed with theological argument and biblical scholarship. Most church members live out their religious life life within their local congregation. That little community is what matters the most. The broader Christian community beyond it usually matters much less. Convincing them that accepting female leadership will benefit that little community is probably one of the major keys to getting lay church members to accept women in pastoral ministry. Research in the United States indicates that the 'horror stories' of congregational decline associated with the introduction of a woman as pastor simply do not materialize once she is on the scene (Lehman, 1985a; Royle, 1982). Similar studies in England will probably yield the same results – showing that congregations work as well under the pastoral leadership of a woman as of a man.

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THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO FEMINISM

Secular Feminism's Impact

There is growing interest within the church in feminism and the issues this raises for women in the church(1). It looks very much as if a wholly secular movement, originating in the USA in the 1960s has become so powerful in secular thinking that it is forcing all our institutions, the church included, to rethink their attitudes towards women, womanhood, manhood and sexuality. Since it is often the younger, highly educated women within the church who are advocating and pressing for changes, we have to consider whether they have grown up in an environment which takes-for-granted many of the claims of feminism, without stopping to ask how far they can be reconciled, if not grounded in Christianity or Biblical teaching(2). Are feminist sympathists within the church being uncritical and undiscerning we might ask? Is this just the latest transitory fad to sweep through Western society? On the other hand, the older generation's lack of interest and sometimes strong opposition to any feminist ideas within the church could equally well be attributable to the same source; that is, to socialised and uncritical learning of secular gender roles, which are not necessarily 'Christian'. Christians