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Evangelical Christianity and Women's Changing Lives

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ABSTRACT Women have outnumbered men as followers of Christianity at least since the transition to industrial capitalist modernity in the West. Yet developments in women's lives in relation to employment, family and feminist values are challenging their Christian religiosity. Building on a new strand of gender analysis in the sociology of religion, this article argues that gender is central to patterns of religiosity and secularization in the West. It then offers a case study of evangelical Christianity in England to illustrate how changes in women's lives are affecting their religiosity. Specifically, it argues that evangelical Christianity continues to be important among women occupying more traditional social positions (as wives and mothers), but adherence is declining among the growing number whose lives do not fit this older model.

KEY WORDS Christianity ◆ church attendance ◆ evangelicalism ◆ gender ◆ religiosity ◆ secularization ◆ women

SECULARIZATION, GENDER AND THE CHURCH

Secularization – in Bryan Wilson's (1966: xiv) well-known definition, 'the process whereby religious thinking, practices and institutions lose social significance' in the transition to industrial capitalist modernity in the West – has been one of the sociology of religion's chief concerns (Berger, 1967; Bruce, 2002; Dobbelaere, 2002; Martin, 1978, 2005; Wilson, 1966). Yet secularization theory has generally been gender-blind, ignoring gender differences and taking men's experiences of the disenchanted bureaucratic workplace and other state institutions as the norm (Brereton and Bendroth, 2001; Woodhead, 2005). In the 21st century, a group of scholars, notably Callum Brown, Linda Woodhead and Penny Long Marler (see later), have begun a gender-based critique and reformulation,[1] arguing that in so far as secularization is an accurate description of changes associated with

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modernity, it impacts men and women differently. From the mid-18th century in the industrializing countries of Western Europe and North America, not only did the state begin to take over the functions of religion (such as welfare and education), but home and work became separate and gendered. This process accelerated during the 19th century. Siphoned off from the public realm, religion was equated with the private female sphere, while men's public tasks (paid work and, for some, political participation) were disconnected from the sacred. There are insufficient quantitative data covering the transition from traditional to modern societies that differentiate churchgoing by gender, but what exists suggests that as societies industrialized, women became dominant in church attendance and men's attendance decreased (Woodhead, 2005). For example, Field (1993: 66) traces a gradual rise in the proportion of members of British nonconformist churches who were female, from 58.6 percent in 1751–75 to about two-thirds from the 1830s until 1950.

The predominance of women in Christian adherence over the last two or more centuries is well established (Walter and Davie, 1998). Yet scholars rarely connect the gender dimension of churchgoing to secularization. This is a pity, since gendering secularization can reveal why women have predominated within Christianity, how changes in women's lives affect their Christian observance, and how pivotal women are to religious trends in the West (Aune et al., 2008; Brereton and Bendroth, 2001; Brown, 2001; Marler, 2008; Woodhead, 2005, 2008).

In claiming that gender is critical to understanding why Christianity has declined so significantly in the UK in the last 50 years, Brown's (2001) book *The Death of Christian Britain* is the most prominent attempt to 'gender' secularization. Brown explores the ideological construction of piety as feminine and femininity as pious that extended from about 1800 until the 1960s. When Christianity was central to the public discourse of femininity, women's church attendance remained high. But when the 1960s and 1970s sexual liberationist and feminist movements provided women with alternative resources for identity construction, Christian religiosity sharply declined. Brown supports this argument with statistical data on churchgoing, baptisms, confirmations and religiously solemnized marriages, arguing that Christian decline intensified in the early 1960s. Indeed, gender may provide the key to the high rates of defection from Christianity that non-gendered theories have difficulty explaining, for in the latter part of the 20th century 'the secularising pressures which had long affected men are suddenly brought to bear on increasing numbers of women as well' (Woodhead, 2005: 28).

Like Brown and Woodhead, Marler (2008: 23) contends that women are central to patterns of religious change in the West; as she puts it, 'as the women go, so goes the church'. Women's (mostly voluntary) work has always been crucial to Christianity's vitality. Yet as traditionally male

industries have moved to the developing world, work in the postindustrial West has been feminized, with negative consequences for women's religiosity. More women work for money, women are entering previously male-dominated occupations, work sectors where women predominate (like the service industry) are growing and skills sought by employers are increasingly those associated with women. In the UK and US, between a fifth and a third of women were in paid employment between 1900 and 1950; by the end of the century, just over two-thirds were (Marler, 2008). With more employed women, whose working hours may conflict with conventional patterns of religious attendance, combining domestic, employment and religious activities is more difficult and women's church commitments suffer. Quantitative studies of the US, UK and Australia reveal that the more hours women spend in paid work, the less likely they are to attend church regularly (DeVaus and McAllister, 1987; Marler, 2008). In Europe, the European Values Surveys show not only that women in paid employment are less religious than women not in paid employment, but also that the levels of religiosity of employed women are closer to the (lower) levels of men than to the (higher) levels of non-employed women (Halman and Draulans, 2006).

Family change is also crucial to women's growing disassociation from Christianity. The family forms growing in western societies are those least common or encouraged in churches. Over the last half-century, cohabitation has rapidly increased and the age of first marriage risen substantially. Divorce rates have increased, more children are born outside marriage and more women are remaining childless. Although many people still aspire to it as an ideal, the nuclear family has ceased to be the numerically dominant household form, while single-person households have multiplied (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Women are more often the ones who transmit the faith, notably to their children (Crockett and Voas, 2006), so if women are attending church less and giving birth to fewer children, this will have a knock-on effect on numbers of people joining the church.

With more focus on self-development in late modernity, the self-sacrificial stance conventionally adopted by Christian women is also falling into disfavour (Woodhead, 2008). What Heelas and Woodhead (2005) call 'life-as' religion, by which they mean adherence to defined roles and expectations (as is traditionally found within Christianity), is eroding. In its place, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) argue, 'subjective-life' spirituality (their term), which caters to the self and is a feature of alternative spiritualities, is increasing in significance. In the UK, for instance, alternative spiritualities have been growing in popularity since the 1970s, and while as many as five times fewer people are involved with what they term 'holistic milieu' activities as go to church, if trends continue holistic activities will begin eclipsing Christianity from about the third decade of the

third millennium (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 45). This has occurred parallel to women's flight from the churches; as women's lives become more 'subjectivized', they find that traditional Christianity no longer works for them so turn to more holistic forms of spirituality (Woodhead, 2007, 2008). The rapid detraditionalization of women's lives explains their increasing interest in alternative spiritualities, argue Houtman and Aupers (2008). Houtman and Aupers illustrate the growth of alternative spirituality, and its greater adoption by post-traditional women than men, through analysis of the World Values survey, conducted in 14 countries between 1981 and 2000. Marler (2008: 47) also traces this movement 'from religious "homemaker" to spiritual "self-maker" ' in the US and the UK in the transition to postindustrial capitalism. Likewise, Furseth (2005) uses quantitative and qualitative data to identify the transition between two generations of Norwegian women from organized religion to individual spirituality, relating this to the changing context of women's lives.

However, it is too simplistic to assert that through family diversity and paid work, women have become less religious and more like men. As Woodhead (2008: 147) aptly comments, 'we cannot simply assume that male experience is the "leading edge" of a secularization process with women falling into line once they come under the sway of the same processes of modernization'. Significant differences between the genders remain, and it is arguable that the postindustrial context brings with it new forms of gender inequality (Adkins, 2002).

Woodhead and Marler argue that it is important to account for secularization's different impact on women in contrasting work and family situations. In doing so, they draw on Hakim's (2003) research identifying three different work and family orientations among contemporary European women.[2] Woodhead (2005) proposes a three-fold typology. Women in traditional roles,[3] as wives and mothers occupied mainly within the private sphere, are shielded from the secularizing effects of modern institutions, so retain a conventional church- and family-focused religiosity. Women who juggle the public and private – working outside and inside the home – will adopt forms of spirituality that cater to the stresses of 'juggling' and reflect their experience of intersecting boundaries. Alternative or holistic spiritualities, with their emphasis on restoring the relational (rather than the individuated) self, do this well (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 94–107). Finally, the women least likely to be (or to remain) involved with Christianity are work-centred women; they will follow a pattern closer to men's and are most likely to be secularized. This model will not neatly apply to all women, may work better as a spectrum rather than as three distinct positions, and needs modifying by factors such as nationality, age and ethnicity. But as something akin to a Weberian ideal type, it remains useful.

EVANGELICAL WOMEN AND SECULARIZATION

So, gendering secularization theory reveals not only why women are more likely to be Christians, but also why the religiosity of women in different social situations is diversifying. Secularization may not be a wholly adequate description of religion's interaction with late modernity,[4] however, and this has prompted some to observe 'desecularization' (Berger, 1999) or 'sacralization' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 429–75) taking place as some forms of religion grow in significance. Evangelical Christianity, especially in its Pentecostal and Charismatic manifestations, exemplifies Christianity's resilience or even growth. Latin America and Africa are notable examples. Even in the West, Pentecostalism is growing (Martin, 2005). Given that evangelicalism can be considered to have escaped the deleterious consequences of secularization, evangelical women's religiosity is worthy of examination.[5]

Those who have studied women's commitment to conservative Protestant Christianity (almost exclusively in the US) have engaged with secularization in two main ways. Some, especially earlier scholars, understand women's embrace of evangelical Christianity, where doctrines of female submission and male authority are common, as an anti-feminist reaction against secularizing modernity. In her ethnographic study, Nancy Ammerman (1987) explains how the fundamentalist 'Southside Gospel Church' employs a conservative understanding of marriage to enforce boundaries between the church and 'the world'. Adhering to male authority and female submission within lifelong marriages (fundamentalists believe divorce is wrong) has, believers claim, kept their marriages together. Yet Ammerman (1987: 146) demonstrates that the impossibility of entire separation from society creates a conflict for fundamentalists who 'must find ways to live with the tension between Fundamentalist norms for family structure and modern norms of individuality and equality'. Angela Aidala (1985: 294) claims that Christian New Religious Movements adhere to 'biblically-based understandings of patriarchy'. Men, to different degrees, take leadership, breadwinner roles, while women submit to men and do most of the childcare. For these authors, evangelical gender conservatism represents a 'backlash' against feminism. In Randall Balmer's (1994) reading of American evangelicalism ('fundamentalism' is his term), evangelicals are interpreted as trying to restore a 19th-century ideal of feminine domesticity in and against a modern, non-religious culture that has rejected that ideal in favour of egalitarianism (see also Rose, 1987).

Yet others have argued that conservative religion has experienced a kind of internal secularization[6] whereby, despite conservative ideals, 'secular' values of equality have taken root in conservative religion, bringing transformations in gender roles that work favourably for women (more attentive husbands, opportunities for involvement in religious ministries, for

example) and enabling women to gain a kind of empowerment. Often motivated by the feminist question 'does religion empower or oppress women?', these recent analyses have taken seriously the need to recognize women's voices and agency rather than dismissing them as victims of false consciousness who collude in their own oppression. In doing so, these authors have taken care to reveal the way in which doctrines of female submission are complicated, denied or subverted. Elizabeth Brusco's (1995, 1997) research with Colombian evangelicals led her to the conclusion that, like feminism, evangelicalism was 'a strategic form of women's collective action' (Brusco, 1997: 14) focused on improving women's position in society through calling men away from 'machismo' to take responsibility for their families. For the women from the Women's Aglow movement studied by R. Marie Griffith (1997: 179), submission to God in prayer and, where necessary, to their husbands, can become 'a means of asserting power over bad situations'. Another study on conservative evangelical women in the US, Brenda Brasher's (1998) *Godly Women*, reveals the relationship between, as the subtitle of the book says, 'fundamentalism and female power'. Women gain power especially through participating in a parallel world of women's ministry groups, where they gain leadership opportunities denied them in their mixed-gender congregations, as well as emotional support from other women. Sally Gallagher and Christian Smith's (1999) interviews with American evangelicals reveal a disjunction between ideology and practice in which despite relatively traditional gender ideologies, cultural and economic shifts influence evangelicals to share wage-earning, parenting and household decision-making.

Scholars have so far treated evangelical women as a cohesive group. The research participants in most existing literature are married, mothers, outside full-time employment and relatively content with their church's theology and practices. Yet, as Ingersoll (2002) points out, a greater diversity of women occupy evangelical churches. Researchers must begin to incorporate single women, women in full-time employment, lone mothers, childless women, feminists and bisexual or lesbian women into their analyses of evangelical communities. The 'counterhegemonic voices' of this more diverse group of female evangelical attendees, Ingersoll (2003: 142) points out, are more often visible in the qualitative research conducted by scholars with previous personal involvement with evangelicalism than by those who approach evangelicalism as outsiders; Ingersoll's own research is a case in point. Her ethnographic fieldwork with feminist evangelical women in pastoral ministry and evangelical institutions of higher education reveals the struggles faced by women who, while remaining committed to evangelicalism, are actively resisting its gender conservatism. Other recent work focusing on different groups of evangelical women includes Wolkomir's (2004) research with women married to ex-gay Christian men and Bryant's (2006) study of female evangelical students in a US university.

Unlike analyses that see evangelicalism as either reacting against secularization by asserting women's traditional roles or as accommodating secularization through adopting egalitarian norms, I propose the following. Changes in women's lives are having a significant impact on women's adherence to evangelical Christianity. Specifically, as women's lives are becoming more heterogeneous, evangelical women's church commitments are diversifying in the ways Marler and Woodhead outline. Those whose lives fit best with the traditional family ideal are most likely to remain actively involved with evangelicalism and committed to its doctrines. 'Adaptive' women, who juggle work and domesticity and do not neatly fit the nuclear family pattern, are likely to incorporate holistic alternative beliefs and practices into their Christian spirituality and give less time to the church. Finally, women who work full-time, are not married, who have feminist orientations or are not heterosexual will be most likely to be marginal church attendees and to disaffiliate. Evangelicalism will retain traditional women but is under threat because of the decline of women's domestic and family roles and the increasing diversity of women's lives.

EVANGELICAL WOMEN AND SECULARIZATION IN ENGLAND

Some recent research enables England to be used as a brief case study in the search for evidence for or against these hypotheses. My research – involving participant observation, interviews and analysis of literature and audiotaped talks – provides qualitative data about how the largest New Church[7] network in England, Newfrontiers (formerly called New Frontiers International or NFI), dealt with women's changing roles. Broadly, women's traditional roles received public support in local congregations and Newfrontiers as a whole. Consequently, women in traditional roles appeared more content with the church and were more involved, while non-traditional women, notably single women, became marginal and in many cases left Newfrontiers.

Newfrontiers's public discourse equated appropriate Christian femininity with family-centred roles. Wives of prominent Newfrontiers leaders led seminars at national events and published literature dealing with women's place in society, family and church. In a movement where involvement as church leaders and preachers to mixed-sex audiences was denied to women by virtue of Newfrontiers's gender theology, the role of the 'leader's wife' was important (Aune, 2004: 139–42). Leaders' wives, who generally had several children and did little or no paid work, were considered role models for other women. Seminars and publications for women focused on the importance of motherhood and putting family before career, the liberating nature of submission in marriage, and encouraged women to

be involved in evangelism and care for non-Christians in the local community. Rather than succumbing to the pressures of 'juggling' housework, paid work and maintaining an attractive appearance and a happy marriage, women were encouraged to focus on their identity 'in Christ' and on their families (Holden, 2000; Virgo et al., 2001). Wendy Virgo (1997: 11), wife of Newfrontiers's founder, writes:

> We need to see the crucial importance of our role in mothering, which has been so drastically undermined, and adopt a positive attitude to it. This may mean postponing our career for a while or taking a part-time job instead of a full-time one, or even being content with a lower-grade one if that can give us more time with our child. But in the end we shall gain in terms of a more integrated, richer family life if we do it in faith.

These public pronouncements seem to function to persuade 'adaptive' women to return to traditional roles.

At 'Westside', the small, quite affluent urban congregation where I carried out participant observation over a period of 15 months, this message was not adopted in a straightforward way.[8] Notably, a clear difference between the married and single women was visible. Married women, mothers and women who were not working full-time seemed the most involved with the church and the most content with their place in it. Jane is a case in point. An educated creative professional, Jane had made career sacrifices in favour of family life during her twenties, declining an interview for a prestigious job because it would mean moving away from her local church and fiancé. In her early thirties when I conducted my fieldwork and married to Mark, one of Westside's leaders, she gave up full-time employment on having children and does periodic paid work as an artist.

At a church meeting attended by visitors, Jane introduced herself as 'mainly a mum at the moment but also an artist'. She stays at home with her children, but does not believe that women always should:

> I'm the one that looks after small babies because of, um, breastfeeding and also temperamentally I'm probably better at looking after small children day in day out than Mark because I think there's a sort of longer term patience level. But that's not necessarily true for every couple, so I don't think that's set in stone. I've seen couples when she goes back to work and he stays at home and it's worked perfectly well.

Jane wanted to be a good mother but was concerned that she was not. During a conversation over dinner, Jane criticized contemporary fiction portraying mothers as incapable of talking about anything other than children, in contrast to the independent single women who have 'wonderful lives'. Jane said she wished 'someone would write a novel in which the heroine is a married woman who spends the day looking after the kids and that's what's heroic about her'. But Jane was also critical of contemporary

Christian idealizations of full-time motherhood. 'Lots of Christian women feel guilty because they feel they have to be at home with their children, like their mothers were for them', she said, adding that in Christian contexts 'there's also this pressure to be a superwoman and to do all the housework perfectly'. Another time, Jane told the group that she was getting little sleep due to her children waking her up. However, she felt better able to deal with it after a recent spiritual experience. In a rare moment alone, she went for a walk in the park where her wedding photographs were taken. She explained:

> I said to God, 'Lord, I've got 20 minutes, speak to me.' God said to me, 'Look up' and I saw parts of my life flash through my mind: getting married, having children and then what I would do in the future. Then God said 'and this is where you are now, look, this bit here' and pointed to where I was now. He reassured me that I'm in the right place.

Here Jane's family focus is sanctioned by God. However, domesticity is only 'this bit here'. Jane sees a future beyond it and does not regard motherhood as her whole identity as mothers might traditionally have done. In sum, Jane gives substantial support to women's traditional roles but nevertheless wants some space, within the church and workplace, for her other skills to be exercised and rewarded (as, in fact, they were at Westside). Woodhead (2008) and Marler (2008) have commented that notwithstanding the space it provides for self-development and gender reforms, evangelicalism remains an arena towards which women who want defined roles and the patriarchal bargain of male protection may gravitate, and Jane and others like her exemplify this.

But if women in family-centred roles find support for these roles within evangelical congregations, non-traditional women struggle. At Westside, the construction of marriage as the normative status rendered being single non-normative and led to disaffiliation of unmarried women (Aune, 2008). Westside members considered singleness a less desirable state and the single women (single men were almost entirely absent in this congregation) were encouraged to prioritize finding a husband. Single women's social status was lower and they were given fewer leadership roles in the congregation (for example leading Bible studies or being on the wider church leadership team). On my follow-up visit two-and-a-half years later, the disaffiliation of almost all the single women was noticeable. Women outnumbered men at Westside, and the desire to leave to attend churches with a lower gender imbalance in the hope of finding a suitable Christian partner was one factor in the women's disaffiliation. There seemed to be several other factors but the lack of fit between their feminist orientations, their lives as single women (mostly in full-time work or study or juggling care commitments) and their marriage-focused congregation stood out. As a participant observer within the wider evangelical

subculture, I encountered quite a few former Newfrontiers members (male and female) who had ceased to belong or who chose to leave several years later. These disaffiliated members, who were mostly either unmarried or had egalitarian attitudes, generally left to attend less theologically conservative churches (Aune, 2004: 226–68).

Two other recent studies support the hypothesis that women who are not in conventional roles are becoming dissatisfied with British evangelicalism. My questionnaire study with 94 evangelical women (Aune, 2002) depicts the marginality of single women who, while appreciating the community spirit and opportunities for service their churches provided, nevertheless often felt marginal within family-oriented congregations. While there are neither systematic data on disaffiliation nor a follow-up study to discover whether women left the church permanently later, a small number of women revealed that they had temporarily stopped attending church. It seems likely that in some cases the underlying dissatisfaction will ultimately have led to disaffiliation. Sharma's (2007) study of the church's impact on the sexual identity development of 36 (mostly British) women who had been involved with Protestant churches (some evangelical) as young women (aged 18–25) also reveals disaffiliation, either temporary or permanent. Most of those who left were older. Sharma argues that while the church helps young women negotiate their developing female identities, after the age of 25 it no longer seems as relevant to their lives as it once did.

There are insufficient quantitative data to enable firm conclusions, but nevertheless, data from the English Church Census (conducted in 1989, 1998 and 2005) reveal a recent decline in Christian adherence among women that is especially pronounced in the evangelical sector.[9] The gender imbalance in churchgoing as a whole seems to have been decreasing in recent years: in 1989 and 1998 women accounted for 58 percent of churchgoers but in 2005 this dropped to 57 percent (Brierley, 2006a: 12.3). It is too early to tell if this decrease will hold and is significant, but if it remains and is substantiated it lends support to the suggestion that as men and women's roles become less differentiated in postindustrial society, their religious behaviour becomes more similar. This apparent shift is occurring in a context where attendance at Christian churches is decreasing rapidly, from 9.9 percent of the population attending on a Sunday in 1989 to 7.5 percent in 1998 and 6.3 percent in 2005 (Brierley, 2006a: 12.2). With small exceptions, the declining gender imbalance represents a reduction in women's attendance, not an increase in men's. From 1989 to 1998, women accounted for 57 percent of those lost from the church; this increased to 65 percent from 1998 to 2005, with the percentage loss of women greatest in the 15–44 age ranges (Brierley, 2006b: 111–42). This is interesting, since it is at these ages that women are especially busy – forming partnerships, having and caring for children, making and keeping

their own homes and developing careers – and these activities may be taking precedence over church involvement. Indeed, Peter Brierley (2006b: 111–42), the lead researcher on the English Church Census, comes to a similar conclusion. However, it is important not simply to interpret loss as apostasy. Loss of faith is just one of many reasons people leave churches. Decline in overall religious affiliation can relate to fewer people joining the church than previously or to lower fertility rates. Additionally, as Hout et al. (2001) point out, it may signify people attending church less regularly, switching from one denomination to another or shifting to what Grace Davie (1994) has called 'believing without belonging'.

Attendance is declining in evangelical churches in England, albeit more slowly than in other branches of Christianity. When quantitative data on evangelical decline are examined separately from the general quantitative data on Christianity, three points are noteworthy. First, the gender imbalance in churchgoing seems to be declining, pro rata, at a greater rate among evangelicals. The proportion of evangelicals who are female declined from 59 percent to 56 percent from 1989 to 2005. Second, between 1989 and 2005 evangelicals lost three times more women (136,660) than men (45,920). Proportionate to their number by gender, women have ceased attending at about double the rate of men (about 14 percent vs just over 7 percent respectively). Third, age is a significant factor and decline is greatest among younger women.[10] While numbers of evangelicals grew between 1989 and 2005 among the over-45s (with men's rate of increase at least three times greater than women's), they fell quite sharply among the under-45s. The age group that lost the largest proportion of women was the 15- to 19-year-olds, followed by the under-15s, with 20- to 29-year-olds following shortly after. Consequently, in the younger age groups in 2005 men are beginning to equalize with or outnumber women.[11] While these data are not sufficiently reliable or detailed to make a conclusive link between women's changing roles and changes in evangelical affiliation, they nevertheless open up fruitful avenues for further research.

Class impacts religious commitment as well as gender and age. Evangelical churches have tended to attract a higher than average proportion of middle-class attendees, partly because it is the middle classes who can afford to fit the male breadwinner family ideal that many evangelicals advocate. As long as men's middle-class jobs continue to enable this and women who have grown up with more feminist values remain willing to sacrifice a career to raise their children, evangelicalism will remain well suited to this section of the population. Jane from Westside is a good example of this. Moreover, in postindustrial societies, where class inequalities are being reconfigured, evangelicalism may prove an attractive refuge for those especially affected by this because it provides security in changing economic circumstances; this is what Judith Stacey (1987, 1990) found in her research with

evangelical women in California's Silicon Valley in the 1980s. Nevertheless, postindustrialization also, as the research discussed in this article suggests, accompanies a decline in evangelical affiliation. Evangelicalism is less and less compatible with women's paid work in the new economy and women's diverse family arrangements and increasingly egalitarian values. Gender is central to the current reconfiguration of class in postindustrial societies, in the sense that low-paid female service sector and care workers are taking over from male manual workers as the key workers and the new proletariat in the flexible economy (Bradley, 1999). These women fail to fit the traditional evangelical model of femininity. They cannot give their time to the church as women once did, and neither their work schedules, family commitments nor their more egalitarian values are a comfortable fit with evangelicalism. When examining changes in women's lives and their impact on women's religiosity, scholars should address class alongside gender, with which class intersects.

CONCLUSION

The centrality of gender to understanding religiosity and secularization is becoming clearer. The processes of modernity have constructed religion as private and as feminine, but in late modernity this pattern is eroding as women's lives become more diverse. Women who remain in family-centred roles are most likely to retain a conventional religiosity, while those most involved in the public sphere are least likely to be affiliated to Christianity. As a form of Christianity often considered successful amid secularizing pressures, evangelical Christianity's support among women provides an important area of investigation. Through a brief case study of evangelical Christianity in England, I have argued that evangelicalism does not seem to have succeeded in resisting secularization. On the contrary, while evangelical religiosity continues among women occupying more traditional social positions (as wives and mothers), adherence is declining among those whose lives do not fit the older pattern of marriage and full-time motherhood.

Factors such as location, ethnicity, denomination and age must also be examined to uncover their intersection with gender in evangelicalism. In England, two of the three denominations where women are least represented (Pentecostal and New Churches) are the denominations that have grown in the past two decades.[12] The male majority is greatest in the 15–19 age groups, where women make up 45 percent of New Church attendees; they account for 44 percent in the Independent churches and 43 percent in the Pentecostal churches (Brierley, 2006a: 5.8). If these continue to be the sectors that grow while others decline, it is possible that in the future men

will begin to outnumber women in church membership, heralding a reversal of the female majority that has endured for at least two centuries. Further research is needed into the distinctive features of Pentecostal, Independent and New Churches that are proving less attractive to women (or more attractive to men). One potentially significant feature is that they, along with Baptists, have the lowest proportion of female ministers (Brierley, 2006a: 5.5), a phenomenon that normally reflects more conservative attitudes towards gender. If women are, as I have suggested, turning away from forms of church that cater for traditional gender roles, the New Church, Pentecostal and Independent churches' gender traditionalism may be proving especially unappealing. However, ethnicity also has an important bearing on this: the newer and growing (especially Pentecostal) churches attract significant black and immigrant populations, and these may represent a different gender composition than the white or indigenous populations.

Younger women's disinclination to belong to Christianity relates to age as well as gender. As Christianity declines in popularity and cultural influence, residual Christian knowledge among young people is eroding (Savage et al., 2006). In a society where women's traditional roles are much less common, where younger women expect to have a career and are less likely than ever to marry or have children, the probability that they will select forms of religion that emphasize traditional gender roles is small. Additionally, their egalitarian attitudes (Phillips, 2004) may be more compatible with alternative spiritualities; alternatives such as horoscopes and Wicca are attracting growing interest among young women, who are using them – perhaps as young women once used Christianity – to make sense of their lives (Berger and Ezzy, 2007).

Much more research, especially of a quantitative nature, is necessary to refine or refute the hypotheses presented here. But what is clear is that while theorists continue to debate the utility of secularization theory, and churchgoers (especially evangelicals) consider how to work towards a strong future for evangelical Christianity, they will not grasp the full picture without paying attention to women's changing lives.

NOTES

I am grateful to Peter Brierley and David Voas for their helpful comments on a draft of this article and to the anonymous reviewers, whose guidance strengthened the article.

1. A further challenge concerns whether secularization theories are relevant to non-Christian religions. This is important but because of space constraints, this article's focus is only on Christianity.
2. Concentrating on Britain and Spain, Hakim (2003) identifies three different work and family orientations among European women. Just under a fifth are

'home-centred', preferring the man to work while his wife runs the home. The majority, about two-thirds, are 'adaptive', balancing domestic tasks with part-time paid work. Finally, just under a fifth are 'work-centred', wanting gender equality in employment and domestic tasks (Hakim, 2003: 85). While the contention that these are 'choices' is debatable (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005), the typology remains useful.

3. While not entirely satisfactory, the term 'traditional' is used in this article to denote the roles women adopted as part of the transition to industrial modernity. At this time, the home and the workplace became separate, gendered spheres and the home became the primary place of work and identity for women (especially middle-class women who could afford not to work for money) (Davidoff and Hall, 2002).
4. For one thing, secularization theory is most – even solely – applicable to Europe (Davie, 2002). For a critical reformulation of secularization that attends to religious and geographical differences (but not gender differences), see Martin (2005).
5. For the remainder of the article, the focus is on evangelical Christians rather than Protestants in general. Evangelical Christians are conservative Protestants; they believe in the authority of the Bible, the divinity of Christ and 'the efficacy of Christ's life, death, and physical resurrection for the salvation of the human soul' (Hunter, 1983: 7; see also Bebbington, 1989). Behaviourally, evangelicals are characterized by an individual and experiential attitude towards salvation, and a conviction of the need to spread the message of Jesus to those outside the church (see also Bebbington, 1989). Evangelicalism and fundamentalism are often conflated in media discourse and popular understandings. By contrast, evangelicals often differentiate themselves from fundamentalists, seeing fundamentalism as too theologically literalistic and socially separatist (Bebbington, 1989: 275–6). However, this distinction may be overplayed too. It is more accurate to view fundamentalism 'as a faction *within* Evangelicalism and not as a movement *distinct from* Evangelicalism' (Hunter, 1987: 4). See also Harris (1998).
6. Karel Dobbelaere (2002), an important secularization theorist, argued that secularization takes place on three levels: societal, organizational and individual. Thus, it is possible for religious organizations to become led by secular principles (bureaucracy, liberalism, etc.).
7. 'New Church' is an umbrella term for networks and churches, generally of a charismatic evangelical persuasion, that emerged from the 1970s in the UK.
8. Names and other minor details have been changed to preserve anonymity.
9. Further quantitative research is needed to verify or counter this since collecting data about gender was not the main objective of the English Church Census and because the methods of data collection, calculation and publication are not intended to produce precise figures. I am grateful to David Voas and Peter Brierley for these clarifications.
10. This finding is different from Sharma's qualitative data showing disenchantment with church after the age of 25, but differences in the research methods and samples account for at least some of this difference.
11. Author's own calculations from English Church Census data for 1989 and 2005 available in Brierley (2006a, 2006b) and, where figures were not published, from figures supplied to author by Peter Brierley.
12. The third group with a lower proportion of women are the Independent churches. These, however, are in decline (Brierley, 2006a: 5.6).

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