

25 Christianity isn't a manly religion. It's just for women and children.

Christianity isn't a manly religion. It's just for women and children. Ever heard people say that? How do you answer?

First - a very basic point. The prevalence of men in church leadership and administration makes for a higher proportion of women in ordinary membership. Often men are up front and women and children are more represented in the congregation. This sits uncomfortably in twenty first century Britain where the interchange-ability of men and women and equal opportunities for the sexes are more and more evident.

Whilst the church can be accused of restricting women's ministry the irony is that in Britain women are indeed more represented in church. The basis of restricting some aspects of leadership to men is in the biblical teaching that men and women are equal under God yet called to complementary roles. Just as men cannot be mothers some say women cannot be priests! The jury is out on this, at least in the Anglican Church. There the historic practice of reserving the ministerial priesthood to men, faithful to Christ's choice of male apostles, is being challenged by the ordination of women.

In some ways Christianity is less unmanly than *too much* dominated by men. Though Christ calls his priests and ministers to a servant ministry that hasn't stopped men misusing the authority they've been given to build their own kingdom and not His! Sometimes the reaction to this by feminists can come across as an equally un-Christian power game.

Where churches burn on all cylinders they seem to draw in all ages and both sexes. Pope Benedict has said *whoever has recognized a great truth, who has found a great joy, should transmit it and not keep it to himself. Gifts so large are never destined for one person.* You could add, nor one sex! There's something so basic and powerful and joyful about the love of God in Jesus that it crosses *all* barriers.

By its nature Christian faith is all demanding and geared to set people on fire. It's not for wimps. Men like St. Francis helped revive the church in the thirteenth century by building up teams of men. Francis also inspired Clare to build women's communities. He himself mirrored the way Jesus worked with the twelve men who became the foundation of the church.

Go back from Jesus, the Son of David, to his spiritual ancestor King David of Old Testament fame. We read how David's legacy included the mighty men of valour mentioned in 2 Samuel Chapter 23. Where the Holy Spirit makes full impact both men and women are ignited with a vision, passion and energy to change the world and build God's kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Christianity isn't a manly religion. It's just for women and children. This perception is best challenged by personal encounters with men who have found a passion for Christ and they *are* there - in strength.

For seven years I was parish priest in a mining village. I inherited a church with few miners in the congregation. Over my period as Vicar the number of men attending grew remarkably. This was due to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. I recall the Easter Sunday Eucharist in the midst of the 1984 mining dispute. Two miners stood up, one striking and one still working, and shook hands before us all. Their love for Jesus mattered more than which union they belonged to. The two Christian miners became admired role models in the village.

Even if British Christianity flows gently at times there's no lack of energy about Christianity worldwide, especially in Africa and South America. In those lands the church seems to attract a greater representation from men. One of the most exciting books to be written with a Christian perspective in recent years is the infectious testimony of a Chinese Pastor to the vibrant faith of his church that grew through harsh persecution. *The Heavenly Man* is a story of courage and adventure coupled to great expectations of God.

So far as manly Christian heroes go in our day Nelson Mandela is probably most famous, both for his challenging of apartheid and for his forgiving his persecutors. To fight for a cause, to suffer for it and to be magnanimous in victory is a powerful image that challenges traditional manliness.

Christian faith adds to people's capacity for adventure. Is it a coincidence that TV adventurer Bear Grylls is a practising Christian? Vision, passion, energy – all of these are there in Christianity, an adventure that draws men and women alike into a cause that will outlast us all.