World Christianity as a Women’s Movement

Dana L. Robert

The recognition that Christian affiliation is shifting to the Southern Hemisphere has released tremendous academic energy on issues of Christianity as a world religion, and it has provoked studies of the particular nature of faith and religious participation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Scholars like Andrew Walls have been arguing for years that the majority of Christians of the non-Western world should be put in the center of scholarly agendas. Yet it appears that the same path is being trod as in other fields of history, namely, to bury women’s participation in a larger narrative, in this case one called “world Christianity.”

What would the study of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America look like if scholars put women into the center of their research? In this article I argue that the current demographic shift in world Christianity should be analyzed as a women’s movement, based on the fact that even though men are typically the formal, ordained religious leaders and theologians, women constitute the majority of active participants. First, I examine the evidence for women’s presumed majority in world Christianity. Statements that women are “naturally” more religious than men or that women “always” outnumber men in churches need to be analyzed or else they fail to do justice to the complexity and diversity of women’s experiences of Christianity. Second, I survey recent studies that examine gender-based reasons for conversion. Why do women convert to Christianity? Are there gender-based factors for women’s conversion that extend across different cultures?

The Female Majority in World Christianity

In 1999 I claimed that “the typical late twentieth-century Christian” was no longer European “but a Latin American or African woman.”2 In March 2001 an article in the London Times asserted that the “average” Anglican was a twenty-four-year-old woman.3 Later Philip Jenkins’s important book The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (2002) appeared, in which he stated, “If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian favela.”4 Neither my article nor Jenkins’s book explored the hard data behind this assertion—because there wasn’t any.

My statement that the growing world church is largely female was reached by extrapolating from histories of conversion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with information from regional qualitative studies of rapidly growing groups in Africa and Latin America—in particular, African indigenous churches (AICs) and Latin American Pentecostals. Bengt Sundkler gave the first hint of growing African female participation rates in Bantu Prophets in South Africa (1948), his pioneering study of AICs. Sundkler noted that among Zulus, congregations of historic mission churches were composed mostly of females and were thus referred to by their pastors as “women’s church.” Female local leaders showed more initiative than men in leading prayer meetings, congregational visitation, and singing. As AICs then broke off from the mission churches, female prophets emerged who believed themselves empowered by the Holy Spirit.5 David and Bernice Martin, in their groundbreaking empirical studies of the conversion of Latin American Roman Catholics to Pentecostalism, indicated that two-thirds of Pentecostals in Central America were women.6 Thus I surmised that if the fastest growing indigenous groups in Latin America and Africa were predominantly female, and that if in the year 2000 these continents together contained roughly 41 percent of the world’s Christians,7 then one could speak of the typical Christian in 2000 as a Latin American or African female. Although I used Latin American and African material as sources for my conclusions, the case for a global non-Western female majority was strengthened by other evidence that growing churches in Asia, such as Chinese house churches and Korean cell groups, are also predominantly female.

Women in Pentecostalism. Another way to test whether there is a female majority in the growing churches of the Southern Hemisphere is to look not at growth points in particular geographic regions but at studies of the largest blocks of Christian affiliation, namely Pentecostalism and Catholicism. In the late twentieth century, both movements provided a universal theological framework and represented cultural trends that cut across different regions of the world. Sociologist David Martin sees Pentecostalism as a response to the early phase of modernization, a fusion of “populist Christianity” with “black spirituality” and “shamanism.” As a “global option,” Pentecostalism is based on “individual choice, movement, fraternal association, and the nuclear family.” The most rapidly growing block of Christians in the twentieth century, Pentecostalism accounts, by Martin’s estimate, for roughly one in eight Christians in the world.8 Older studies of North American Pentecostalism emphasized the marginality of its adherents, who, according to “deprivation theory,” tended to be women, African-Americans, new immigrants, and the disabled. Although deprivation theory is clearly inadequate to explain something that involves one-eighth of the world’s Christians, theories of globalization are now used to emphasize how Pentecostalism around the world is a response among displaced and migrant peoples facing the impersonality of urbanization and the corrosiveness of modernity on traditional communities.

Studies of Pentecostalism provide strong evidence that there is a female majority in world Christianity today. In his overview, An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity, South African Pentecostal scholar Allan Anderson takes what he calls a “multicultural” rather than a “historical” approach to the subject. Rather than tracing all Pentecostalism from the American movement at Azusa Street in 1906, he assumes that Pentecostalism had multiple points of origin. This multicultural approach allows him to follow David Barrett and Walter Hollenweger by folding into his definition of Pentecostalism many of the indigenous churches that emerged in the twentieth century—whether or not they call themselves Pentecostal—based on theology and worship styles that focus on the experience of the Holy Spirit.9 Anderson’s multicultural nomenclature allows him to claim that “in less than a hundred years, Pentecos-
tal, Charismatic and associated movements have become the largest numerical force in world Christianity after the Roman Catholic Church and represent a quarter of all Christians.10 Anderson’s definitions double the number of Pentecostals counted by David Martin.

Regardless of Anderson’s method of counting, the important point for this article is that he unpacks the category of Pentecostal to reveal that three-fourths of them live in the “majority world.” Not only are three-quarters of the world’s Pentecostals from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but also “throughout the world, there are many more [Christian] women than [Christian] men.”11 Like so many other studies, the fact of a female majority lies embedded in Anderson’s data. He attests that not only is Pentecostalism the fastest-growing block of Christians in the world, but three-fourths of them live in the “third” world—and of these the vast majority are women.

As he surveys Pentecostalism by region, Anderson occasionally comments on gender ratios. Not only were women the majority of “apostles” at the Azusa Street revival, but the majority of missionaries who went out as early self-supporting missionaries from Azusa Street were women; Hispanic Pentecostals in North America are predominantly women and children; and Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria, are largely women.12 According to Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, who has conducted a major study of indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana, involvement in Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Ghana runs 60 percent female and 40 percent male. When asked to distinguish between the newer Pentecostal and the older indigenous churches, groups that Barrett, Hollenweger, and Anderson tend to lump together, Asamoah-Gyadu perceived closer gender parity in the newer, more urbanized groups than in the older Aladura or Spirit churches.13 His comments suggest that we should hesitate to sweep indigenous movements under the Pentecostal umbrella or to make broad generalizations about female majorities in the whole. Clearly there is a need for detailed studies of gender-linked participation for different types of churches, even those consolidated under the Pentecostal umbrella by outside researchers.

Women in Roman Catholicism. The largest ecclesiastical grouping in the world remains Roman Catholicism, composing roughly half the world’s Christian population. Catholics and Pentecostals are not entirely separate groups, as the large number of Catholic charismatics attests. Nevertheless, David Martin analyzes global Catholic culture as markedly different from that of Pentecostalism. As a generalized model, Catholics tend toward “locality, birthright membership, continuity, and extended familial and communal obligations,” as opposed to the mobility and dislocation characteristic of Pentecostals.14 Martin’s generalizations about Catholic culture seem to work best where Catholicism dates back several centuries and has become integrated into traditional clan-based social structures. In Latin America, with its five hundred years of official Catholicism, Catholic identities have synthesized elements of official church practice with pre-Christian worldviews, including traditional rituals that address problems of evil and suffering. In non-Western Catholic cultures, with their habitual shortages of priests, adherence to Catholicism is better tested by participation in popular rituals and by communal identification than by regular attendance at Mass.

According to some scholars, the violent and incomplete nature of the European conquest of Latin America means that women’s domestic cultures maintained greater continuity with pre-Christian worldviews in the realms of both the “supernatural” and the “mundane” than did those of males.15 Official church disapproval of “sacretism” and “folk religion” has yielded in recent years to church-based reflections on popular Catholicism as inculcated forms of the faith, and to scholarly studies of “border crossing.” In the new appreciation for popular Catholicism, women are less often dismissed as superstitious syncretists, but rather hailed as keepers of a flexible cultural continuity for their communities and families.16 In 1999 Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest published a fascinating collection of empirical studies entitled Popular Catholicism in a World Church. Seven case studies of Catholic inculturation reveal the high devotion of non-Western Catholics to communal religiosity and to rituals. Unfortunately, even in this fine collection sustained attention to gender is minimal, partly because of a shortage of female researchers for the case studies.17 The editors of the project do indicate, however, that in popular Catholicism around the world, most participants are women.18

Women in popular Catholicism appear to be most active in communal devotions designed to ensure the well-being and health of their families. On the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, for example, women dominate several sodalities. They wear special white uniforms, hold regular novenas to pray for healing and guidance, attend special Masses, and pray for the intervention of the saints.19 In Tanzania women constitute the majority of the Marian Faith Healing Ministry, a prayer vigil group that asks the Virgin Mary for intervention, prays for healing and exorcism of evil spirits, visits the sick, and testifies. Although the church hierarchy has condemned the Marian group, the women persist in their popular devotions.20

In addition to localized prayer groups and rituals, major Catholic pilgrimage sites document female majorities, especially in relation to prayers for family healing and communal well-being. Lay Catholics in different countries see Mary as a source of both spiritual and emotional strength, and they eagerly participate in pilgrimages, such as Mexican devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Portuguese devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes, and other manifestations of the Virgin Mary.21 Veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for example, underscores the sacredness of motherhood in Mexican Catholic culture. Records of the annual pilgrimage in Mexico written in 1926 describe thousands of Indian families walking for miles to the shrine in Mexico City, camping out to participate in the 5:00 a.m. Mass. Entering the sanctuary, the pilgrims crawled on their knees toward the shrine, and “numerous women raised their arms aloft in supreme supplication and lifted their faces to heaven while tears streamed down their cheeks.”22 Thomas Tweed’s creative study of Our Lady of Charity follows the pilgrimage of the Virgin herself, as devotion to the patron saint of Cuba traveled with exiles to Miami. He notes that in both Cuba and the United States, most pilgrims to the shrine are women, a gender pattern that has existed since the 1800s, when travelers to Cuba noted that women and children filled the churches. Said Bishop Michael Pfeifer of...
San Antonio in 1994, “God has entrusted the future of humanity to women. Women are the primary evangelizers. . . . Our faith comes primarily from our mothers and grandmothers.”

One way to reveal the gender breakdown in world Catholicism is to examine the enthusiasm for vowed religious life among non-Western women. Even as the number of nuns is dropping in the West, the number of women religious increased by 56 percent from 1975 to 2000 in Africa, and by 83 percent in Asia. In Africa there are one-third fewer Catholic priests and brothers than there are religious sisters. In Asia priests and brothers number less than three-fifths the number of sisters. Although the gender of religious professionals does not necessarily reflect religious participation among ordinary Catholic laity, the fact that religious sisters far outnumber male religious does indicate the attraction of Catholicism for women. With the overall success of sisters’ cross-cultural missions in the twentieth century, many traditionally Western communities of sisters are in the process of becoming non-Western. For example, some congregations of Franciscan sisters are evolving from North American to Brazilian membership. Similar ethnic transitions among female Catholic religious communities are a metaphor for the “Southward shift” in global Catholicism itself.

As with lay pilgrimages, a great attraction to vowed life among non-Western Catholic women lies in their personal identification with the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. Catholic sisters not only look to Mary for spiritual power, but they are themselves also identified as “Marys,” as communal rather than biological mothers of their nations. According to an important study of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the Congo, African sisters are widely seen as “BaMama BaMaseri,” or Mamas of all the people. Congolese women’s traditional value as “life-bearers” meant that the first African sisters who joined the Belgian order in the 1930s and 1940s were ridiculed as barren women or “sterilized cows.” But over time, as local Catholic devotion deepened and the sisters proved themselves as teachers and nurses, they earned the respect of their laity. Congolese sisters see their celibacy not as a loss of “physical maternity” but as “a call to nurture and foster life for all in an unbounded, universal spiritual maternity.” According to Ursuline Mother Superior Bernadette Mbuy-Beya of Lubumbashi, the Catholic sister “bears children for the Church” and is thus “at the centre of inculturation in Africa.”

Although evidence on gender tends to be anecdotal rather than based on statistical surveys, the overwhelming impression
based on a sampling of both regional and ecclesiastical studies is that women constituted roughly a two-thirds majority of practicing Christians in the growing world church in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. From a demographic perspective, Christianity is a women’s religion. Studies of world Christianity, either as global force or as local movement, need to put women’s issues at the center of our scholarship about the growth of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Women and Conversion

Conversion is a significant factor in understanding gender dynamics in the growing world church. Are there gender-specific reasons for the conversion of women that cut across cultural differences? Do women convert more readily to Christianity than do men? Did missionaries replicate European and American gender dynamics in the new churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America? With the transatlantic spread of evangelical Christianity in the late 1700s and early 1800s, new patterns of female religious leadership developed.29 During the Second Great Awakening, revivals occurred because a maternal network of female organizers sought to convert their husbands and children. Evidence for this conclusion is the tendency of women to join the church alone, whereas men typically joined in the presence of their families.30 Did this linkage between revivalism and women’s role in family conversion spread into evangelical Christianity throughout the world? Certainly in Latin American Pentecostalism today, the linkage among mobility and migration, urbanization, and the role of conversion in strengthening the nuclear family provides interesting parallels with North America in the 1800s. In both contexts women promoted the conversion of men and children.31

The conversion of indigenous women in the nineteenth century. The writings of nineteenth-century missionaries indicate that the conversion of women could not be taken for granted. Missionaries in India, China, and Muslim countries often complained that it was difficult to convert women and that the churches attracted only young men. As these men aged and took on more public responsibilities, they tended to fall away from the churches unless they had strong Christian wives. Missionaries often commented that uneducated and “superstitious” Chinese, Indian, and Muslim women were great obstacles to their husbands’ faith. By the mid-1800s, it was frequently argued that women mission-
aries were needed to reach these resistant women, and that without the conversion of wives and mothers, the Christianization of societies could not be assured. Well into the 1920s, missionaries commented that the Chinese church was largely male.

When Western missionaries first entered China and India in the nineteenth century, social ostracism was initially too high a price for women to pay for conversion to Christianity. As the vulnerable members in patriarchal cultures, women could not afford to be cut off from their extended families, or to suffer the economic hardships of being ostracized because of their husbands’ decisions to reject the ways of the village fathers, or to be discarded by a polygamous husband who was allowed to retain only his first wife. Sinologist Jessie Lutz writes of the wife of one of the first Hakka Chinese to become Christian. She threatened to hang herself, and when she later died, her husband returned his Bible to the missionary because of family pressure to give her a traditional funeral. In strict gender-separate societies, women greeted individualized conversion of their husbands with dismay, as negative pressure from the extended family was unbearable. If Hindu or Muslim women wished to become Christians on their own, they could be ostracized or killed by their families, and their children could be taken away. In her study of the early Brahmin convert Anandarao Kaundinya, Mrinalini Sebastian showed that his wife, Lakshmi, was forced by the family to leave him for dead and to take on the Hindu role of widow. Only when missionary women began raising girl orphans or founding girls’ schools was there an infrastructure that could support lower-class female converts in Asia by providing a counter-weight to traditional family control. With the increasing number of women missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their partnership with indigenous Bible women and evangelists, the conversion of women gained momentum in Asia. By the 1920s, even though men still outnumbered women in the churches, the first generation of educated Chinese Christian women leaders were leading revivals, running medical centers, and becoming principals of mission schools.

In contrast to reports from China, anecdotal evidence from the nineteenth century indicates that in localized oral cultures in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, women were among the earliest converts to Christianity. For example, when American missionaries first arrived in Hawa'i, they were greeted on board ship by the emissaries of a female chief, who became an early convert and sponsor of the fledgling church. Royal women in Africa sometimes befriended missionaries and became their sponsors, even in the face of hostility from men. Another category of early female converts was young women trapped in forced marriages. For example, the first convert of the Nazarenes in Swaziland was the tenth wife of an elderly man, who soon brought three other women and their children to the missionaries for instruction. As the church filled with women and children, men persecuted them.

This early openness of African women to Christian conversion was analyzed by historian Adrian Hastings in an important article published in 1993, “Were Women a Special Case?” While recognizing that the conversion of women was integral to social movements toward Christianity, Hastings argued that gender analysis has largely been overlooked in the focus on the political implications of conversion. In his broad purview of African history, Hastings noted how often the first converts seemed to be women. He speculated that early converts saw the relative equality in Christianity as providing an escape from patriarchal customs that oppressed women, such as forced marriage, and personal griefs such as the murder of twins. Even though over time the church followed the typical social pattern of male domination, the liberative potential contained within Christianity continued to attract African women. According to Hastings, it was the leadership of African women that consolidated Christianity as an African religion in the late twentieth century. As early as 1962, female prayer unions were being described as the oldest and most enduring “African organizations in South Africa.”

In 2002 anthropologist John Peel, by analyzing gender factors in the Christianization of the Yoruba in Nigeria, entered the discussion of whether African women tended to convert before men did. While accepting that Christianity is central to African women’s lives and that African women seem to predominate in worship life, Peel rejects Hastings’s generalizations as unsystematic. Studies of gender and conversion must be held in tension with other social factors such as age, and they must be grounded in particular contexts in which missions developed over time. In the mid-1800s women were more opposed to the Gospel than men because abandonment of their traditional religion risked their “reproductive health and success” and thus their very existence in Yoruba culture. As women grew interested in Christianity, they faced persecution for ostensibly jeopardizing the continuity of their husband’s lineage. As they aged, however, women became more attracted to Christianity because it gave them more social freedom and protected them from being condemned as witches. As older men reverted to polygamy to ensure their own social status, Christianity became the venue of women and of young men. By the mid-1870s, in the town of Abeokuta, twice as many women were being baptized as men. Peel ultimately concludes that as the traditional system of patriarchy met the more individualistic patriarchy of mission Christianity, space was created for subordinate groups—here, women—to choose to convert. Both Peel and Hastings attribute initial female conversion partly to the liberation from traditional customs women obtained through Christianity.
can be persuaded to convert, they reject the destructive aspects of machismo such as drinking with other men and visiting prostitutes. Instead, they recommit themselves to their families. An evangelical household improves economically because scarce resources are now directed toward “female” values such as the education of the children. Conversion to evangelicalism occurs in a context of urbanization in which women’s productive roles in peasant economies have been undermined, and the family has become dependent on male wages. In the final analysis, “the pragmatic function of evangelical conversion is to reform gender roles . . . thereby dramatically improving the quality of life within the confines of the family.”

Although Brusco’s data was limited to Colombia, her analysis holds important keys to the conversion of women to evangelical Protestantism and seems consistent with other studies of Protestant revivalism during periods of urbanization. As people move from peasant or rural economies to cities, women’s economic functions are undercut as male wage labor becomes the major source of income. The ethic of the nuclear family, as spread by evangelicalism since its emergence in the 1700s, serves to recommit men to their wife and offspring. As a “strategic women’s movement,” evangelicalism therefore bestows concrete material benefits on the family in the form of male economic loyalty, and also emotional and spiritual support for women. Christian forms of patriarchy, such as doctrines of male headship spread by evangelical groups, are a small price to pay for the moderation of machismo, male drunkenness, and expenditure of high percentages of the family income.

The deepest study of recent female conversion within an African culture is Dorothy Hodgson’s work on Roman Catholicism among the Maasai in Tanzania. Her work is of particular interest to scholars of world Christianity because she studied from historical and sociological perspectives the process of evangelization in territory covered by famous Spiritan missionaries Eugene Hillman and Vincent Donovan. Hodgson’s study asks the question why women have become the vast majority in Maasai Catholicism, even though generations of Catholic missionaries privileged their work among men and were unhappy when women insisted on participation while Maasai men of warrior status repeatedly ignored them. By tracing the history of the nomadic pastoralist people, Hodgson found that women in Maasai culture had always been the gender responsible for the spiritual realm, for prayer to Eng’ai (the high god), and for knowledge of traditional rituals. Women’s greater spirituality is an assumed part of Maasai culture because of their function as life-bearers.

The movement of women into Catholicism occurred in the wake of colonialism and then domination by Tanzanian post-colonial elites, whose policies to circumscribe and redefine the Maasai—including pressuring them to settle—disempowered women and also undercut their communal lifestyle. Despite male opposition, women in the last decades of the twentieth century poured into the church, where they found healing and female solidarity. Maasai women carried their dominance of the spiritual realm into the Catholic Church and saw their prayers there as continuous with their pre-Christian relationship with Eng’ai. Hodgson describes a context in which women’s greater cultural flexibility allowed them to transfer their spiritual lives to the church because its spiritual teachings, structures, and meetinghouse and the sacramental presence of missionary priests gave them a space in which “to create an alternative female community beyond the control of Maasai men.” Hodgson argues strongly that the spiritual realm itself should receive more respect by researchers and not be reduced to a function of politics or anticolonial struggles.

**Why Does Gender Matter?**

In this article I have sampled current literature to argue that world Christianity should be analyzed as a women’s movement. The majority of Christians in the emerging churches of the world are women—a fact that holds both for the major ecclesiastical groupings and for geographic areas of greatest Christian growth. Although many more studies are needed before conclusions can be drawn as to why there are more women than men in the emerging churches of the world, recent empirical research on new Christian movements in Latin America and Africa suggests three gender-linked factors in female church participation.

First, women join churches because in them they find female solidarity and support for their roles in family and community life, often in connection with mitigating the pressures of patriarchal societies. Hodgson goes so far as to suggest that spiritual beliefs and practices “may be central to the production, reproduction, transformation, and negotiation of gendered identities, of masculinities and femininities.” In other words, not only do churches provide communal support for female identity, but forms of spirituality may be integrally related to the construction of gender itself. For ordinary women, the community they experience is more important than raising questions about the patriarchal basis of most church leadership.

Second, women are attracted to new Christian movements because they hold out hope for healing, improved well-being, and reconciliation with others in their communities. Across the growing world church, experiences of healing provide entry points for women in diverse Christian communities, whether Pentecostal or Roman Catholic.

Third, church-based community support for women, and for healing and wholeness, can create new avenues for women’s leadership in patriarchal societies, as well as provide a context in which female education is valued—even if only in church-based instruction for membership. Since much of women’s leadership is directed back into the church, a cycle of female activism works to recruit other women and girls into church membership. Over generations, this cycle of female church participation can become a spiral that propels women into leadership in the larger society.

But what happens if this cycle is broken? What happens if women no longer find fulfillment and satisfaction in church participation? Although gender-based studies of church decline in the non-Western world do not exist as yet, a few British
sociologists that links the decline of Christianity to the pullout of men, while women have maintained higher levels of both church attendance and religiosity. Despite its limitations, however, Brown’s study is powerfully suggestive of why gender analysis ought to occupy a central place in studies of world Christianity. The linkage of gendered piety to the vitality of varied forms of Christianity worldwide suggests why the study of “world Christianity as a women’s movement” is significant not just for scholarship but for the future of Christian practice itself.

Notes


10. Anderson, Introduction to Pentecostalism, p. 1. It can be misleading (like comparing apples and oranges) to compare church membership statistics using phenomenological rather than ecclesiastical definitions of Pentecostalism.

11. Ibid., pp. 5, 169.

12. Ibid., pp. 57, 59, 5.


17. Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara points out that the lack of female researchers means that “women’s variables” and gender issues are largely absent from these case studies (“A Feminist Perspective on Enigmas and Ambiguities in Religious Interpretation,” in Popular Catholicism in a World Church: Seven Case Studies in Inculturation, ed. Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999], p. 258).


21. For Web sites on Marian apparitions, see http://www.apparitions.org or http://members.aol.com/bjw1106/marian.htm.


24. Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), pp. 50, 89. Note that vowed religious have long had a female majority in both Europe and the United States.


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29. Female leadership emerged strongly in the transatlantic revival movements of pietism and Methodism. See, for example, David Hempton, Methodism: Empire of the Spirit (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005).
37. Ibid., p. 123.
40. Ibid., pp. 158, 160, 162.
41. The initial liberation of conversion is often followed by a routinization process in which women lose status relative to men who assume church leadership; nevertheless, women continue to find fulfillment in the churches. Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton makes this point in one of the most thorough studies of gender in an indigenous church; see her Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Ruto Religion in Western Kenya (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).
43. Ibid., p. 135.
46. Ibid., p. 258.
47. Callum G. Brown, The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000 (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 195. From around 1800 to the 1960s in Great Britain, the age in which religious affiliation became a matter of personal choice, it was women’s “influence on children and men, their profession of purity and virtue, their attachment to domesticity and all the virtues located with that, which sustained discursive Christianity in the age of modernity” (p. 195). According to Brown, the chief factor in British secularization in the 1960s was a profound change in female identity that occurred during the youth rebellion and changes in sexual mores of the era: “Discourses on feminine identity were now conveyed by everything other than family, domestic routine, virtue, religion or ‘respectability’” (p. 195).
48. “Female rebellion—of body, sexuality and above all the decay of religious marriage—was a transition out of the traditional discursive world” (ibid., p. 196).
49. See Walter and Davie, “The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West.” Walter and Davie found that Western women attended church in even greater percentages than men, especially in mainline churches. The declines in church participation in England and Holland during the late twentieth century were related to a fall-off in the church participation of men more than of women. In their opinion, the inconclusive nature of studies on gender and religiosity underscores the general failure by scholars to address “the question of why women are more religious than men” (p. 656).