



# GENDER ROLES AND RELIGION



# This week's lectures

- We start in this first lecture by taking a look at another way religious practice reinforces certain gender roles and relationships, using Christian gendered ministries as a case study.
- Then, we will take a brief survey of women's involvement (or lack thereof) in religious traditions, particularly their ability to serve as priests/religious functionaries.
- We will watch a film *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican* in Wednesday's class, then discuss it in the tutorial alongside the reading by Marian Ronan

# Men's ministries

- Arose in 1970s (initially in the USA) in response to increasing anxieties about the 'feminizing' of the church and a general drop in male membership.
- Possibly a response to second-wave feminism that arose around the same time?
- Appealing to a particular type of 'godly masculinity' – often based on cultural stereotypes of masculinity, but also *countercultural* about masculine sexuality.
  - Brotherhood (homosocial relationships)
  - Sexual purity (anti-pornography and casual sex) – seen as countercultural in a 'sex saturated world'.
  - Family and marriage are both regarded as desirable and godly

# Men's Ministries

- Typically espouse complementarian views of gender roles: men as natural leaders (in the world, the church, and the family), women as naturally passive, gentle, caring, maternal, submissive.
- Alternatives to these divinely ordained gender roles are deemed dangerous and ungodly – a threat to society, the family, and the church.
- Men's ministries draw on traditional heteronormative and cisnormative gender discourses. Queerness is rarely mentioned, let alone embraced.
- Certain themes are utilized frequently, especially sport, hunting, and militarism – the great outdoors (although perhaps there is a gradual shift away? See further slides)
- Popular in NZ and Australia – see Joseph Gelfer reading. Why do you think this is?



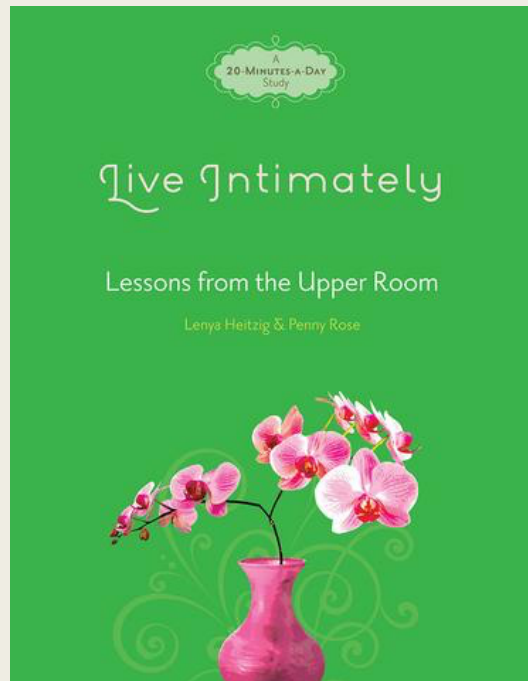
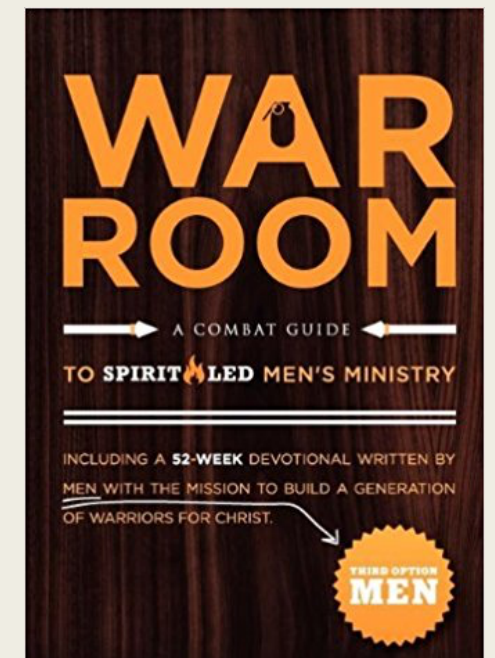
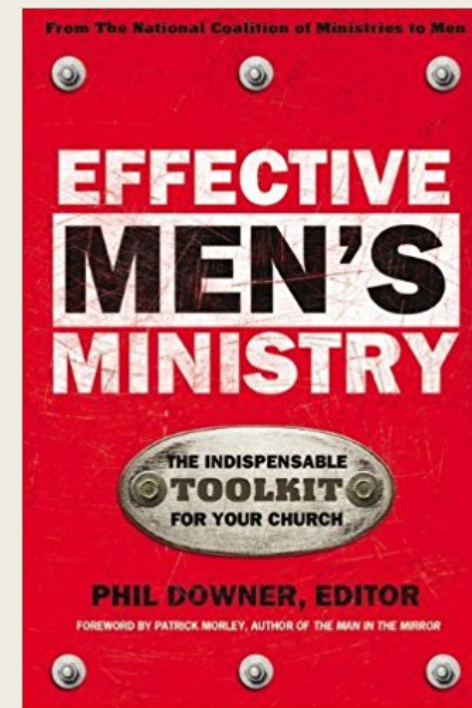
Men's and women's ministries are highly encoded for gender



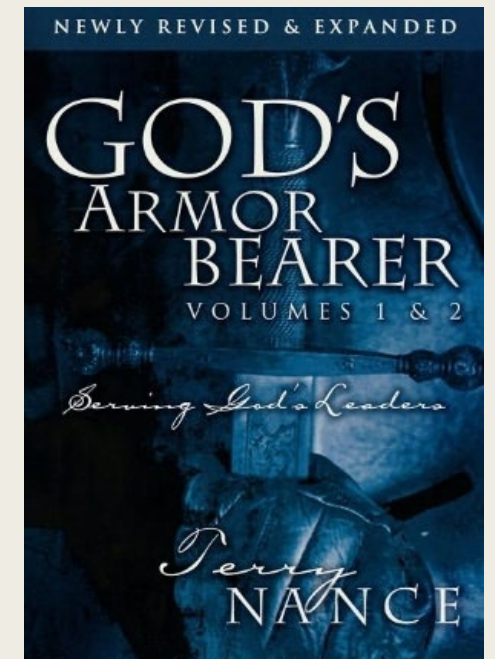








Ministry books are equally encoded for gender – both in the text and the images used





## ‘Godly masculinity’ is countercultural

‘This book pulls back the veil on the elements of our culture that aggressively seek to neuter masculinity, calling it “toxic.”

... This book is a guide to inspire men to re-engage as the spiritual leaders of their homes, in their churches, and within their communities ...

Unfortunately, today being a strong and capable man is seen as offensive ... Men of great character, integrity, and faith are being called to “Man Up” to a critical culture that has lost its moral and spiritual compass under the guise of being politically correct and socially relevant’.

From the Men’s Ministry Catalyst website

# Men's ministry websites and videos

- Check out the men's ministry videos and websites listed under the week 7 module.
- Do you think these ministries have changed over the past 5-10 years?
- What aspects have stayed the same?
- What gender discourses do you see being reinforced in all of them?
- How is religious language being used to reinforce these gender discourses?
- Think about the *cultural* function of men's ministries, and what power structures are being scaffolded by them.

# Things to look for

- How is masculinity and gender roles/relationships described in the text?
- What imagery is used? Think about the colours and mood of the videos and website
- What are men doing in these videos and website images?
- Are there any women (or people of other genders?)
- Are there any queer or trans men present?
- Are there any men with disabilities present?
- How is race represented?
- How is masculinity being represented?
- What men are being excluded from these groups' ideations of 'godly masculinity'?



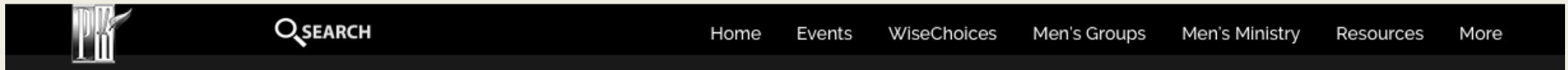
# Let's look at a couple of examples in class

- [Promise Keepers NZ 2008](#) promo video for a conference
- [Promise Keepers \(US\) 2019](#) promo video

Do you see a change in the style and themes used in both videos? And what *hasn't* changed? What might be some reasons for these shifts in style and tone?

It's interesting to look at the changes in the Promise Keepers NZ web page – even between 2017 and 2020 – is it just me, or are they losing their hypermasculine edge? (see next two slides)

# Promise Keepers NZ: website 2017



PIT STOP BLENHEIM



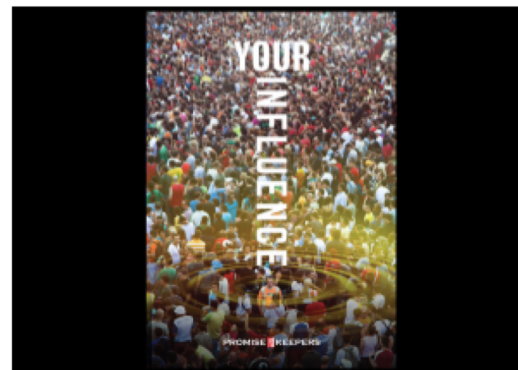
MEN'S BREAKFASTS



WISECHOICES



MEN'S GROUPS



STUDY GUIDES



MEN'S MINISTRY



# Promise Keepers NZ: website 2020

The screenshot shows the Promise Keepers NZ website. The top navigation bar is dark with the PK logo on the left, a search bar, and links for Home, Events, Men's Ministry (with a 'SUBSCRIBE HERE' button), Resources, and More. Below the navigation bar is a tagline: 'Get strength for today and hope for tomorrow! Sign up to PK emails that will empower and encourage you.' The main content area features three event cards. The first card is for 'VISION PK 2020 Online Event' with a blue and green digital background and the text 'WATCH THE ONLINE EVENT'. The second card is for 'Where is God when the Going Gets Tough?' featuring a man in a suit and the text 'ONLINE BREAKFAST WITH MICK DUNCAN'. The third card is for 'Called by the Spirit' featuring a man's portrait and the text 'NAPIER MEN'S EVENT 19 OCTOBER 7PM'. A footer at the bottom left shows the URL 'www.promisekeepers.org.nz/events-diary/'.

PK  
Get strength for today and hope for tomorrow! Sign up to PK emails  
that will empower and encourage you.

SEARCH  
Home Events Men's Ministry Resources More  
SUBSCRIBE HERE

**VISION** PK 2020  
**Online Event**  
WATCH THE ONLINE  
EVENT

**Where is God** when the  
**Going Gets Tough?**  
with Mick Duncan Saturday 17 October  
**ONLINE BREAKFAST  
WITH MICK DUNCAN**

**Called by the Spirit** PK LOCAL  
Men's event with Len Buttner  
Monday 19 October 7pm www.promisekeepers.nz  
Napier Baptist Church 36 Riverbend Road, Napier  
**NAPIER MEN'S EVENT  
19 OCTOBER 7PM**

www.promisekeepers.org.nz/events-diary/

Is PKNZ changing its image?

The second part of this week's lectures focus on women in religious leadership



# Religious leadership and gender

## ■ Hinduism

- *Long tradition of female gurus, priests, and sadhu (ascetic, holy person, monk)*

## ■ Buddhism

- *Ancient tradition of ordained monastics (bhikkhunis), although this has died out (or has been forbidden) in some Theravada Buddhist countries (e.g. Burma, Thailand).*
- *Continues to be permitted in Mahayama Buddhism (e.g. in Japan, Taiwan, China).*





# Religious leadership and gender

- Sikhism: women can participate in any religious function, perform any Sikh ceremony or lead the congregation in prayer.
- Taoism: ordain both men and women as priests.
- Shinto: both men and women can be ordained as priests.
- Islam: in some Western countries, women can serve as imams (spiritual leader, authority, teacher, leads a congregation in salat, or prayer). Elsewhere, women are forbidden from serving as imams.
- Judaism: Orthodox Judaism forbids female rabbis or cantors. Reform and Conservative Judaism permits them.



Regina Jonas, first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in 1935. She died in Auschwitz, 1944

# New Religious Movements

Varied relationship with cultural gender norms:

- Some, but not all, NRMs imitate traditional patriarchal hierarchies.
- Others deliberately subvert or ignore these hierarchies, offering women new opportunities in religious leadership/membership.
- Neo-Pagan and New Age religious movements are particularly explicit in affirming women's roles in religious life.



# Christianity

New Testament texts offer conflicting images of women's involvement in the early church:

**Romans 16** I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a **deacon** of the church in Cenchreae. <sup>2</sup> I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. <sup>3</sup> Greet **Priscilla** and Aquila, my **co-workers in Christ Jesus**. <sup>4</sup> They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. <sup>5</sup> Greet also **the church that meets at their house ...** <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are **outstanding among the apostles**, and they were in Christ before I was.

# But...

**1 Timothy 2** <sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;<sup>l</sup> she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup> But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

The 1 Timothy text is likely written a bit later than Romans – perhaps indicative of a shift in attitude towards women's clerical involvement?

Either way, it is taken as an eternally relevant edict by some church denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and some Protestant denominations.

# Roman Catholic Church

Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatum* (1988):

- Women deserving of equal human dignity but need to maintain distinct gender roles.
- Women had two vocational options:
  - *Wives and mothers*
  - *Celibate members of religious orders.*
- *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994) –reaffirmed this view on women’s ordination.
- The current pope, Francis, has affirmed that *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* will continue.
- Catholic women can serve in non-ordained ministries within the church, as theologians, liturgists, and social activists.
- Other women choose a different path...



# Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP)

- international organization that challenges the Vatican's prohibition of women's ordination by campaigning for change and also ordaining women priests into the Catholic Church.
- Their mission is to: "spiritually prepare, ordain, and support women and men from all states of life, who are theologically qualified, who are committed to an inclusive model of Church, and who are called by the Holy Spirit and their communities to minister within the Roman Catholic Church."
- The Roman Catholic Church decrees that "a baptized male alone" can receive ordination.
- Under the decree of Pope Benedict XVI, there would be a penalty of automatic excommunication against anyone "who attempts to confer a sacred order on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive a sacred order".
- See required reading by Marian Ronan and her critique of RCWP.

# *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*



Documentary directed by Jules Hart (2011) about women ordained as priests in the Roman Catholic Church, despite their 'invalid' status.

You can watch it in class, or at home (it streams via the library home page).

# Questions for the tutorial

Read the article by Marian Ronan.

1. How does Ronan's experience of Catholic women's ordinations in the US (and her critique of the movements that promote them) differ from that of the women interviewed in *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*? And what similarities do you see in the two contexts?
2. How does Ronan draw on the theme of intersectionality? How does PSOTV address (or fail to address) intersectionality?
3. Ronan makes a point that there may be more urgent issues for women activists to address than women's ordination. Do you agree?
4. Are you persuaded by Ronan's argument? Or how might you critique it?