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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2174-8822> (2012) Biblical Literalism: A Test of the Compensatory Schema Hypothesis Among Anglicans in England. *Review of Religious Research*, 54 (2). pp. 175-196.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13644-012-0055-4>

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Biblical literalism: A test of the compensatory schema hypothesis  
among Anglicans in England

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## Biblical literalism: A test of the compensatory schema hypothesis among Anglicans in England

### Abstract

The compensatory schema hypothesis (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008) has been used to explain why women seem to have higher levels of biblical literalism than men in some Christian denominations. Based on social structuration and gender theories, it proposes that biblical literalism is a key social schema in some denominations that deny women access to institutional power. Women compensate for the lack of access to institutional social resources (leadership) by stressing the accepted schema (literalism) more strongly than men. The theory was tested using two samples from the Church of England, one lay ( $N = 394$ ) and one ordained ( $N = 1052$ ). Laywomen were more literal than laymen among evangelicals and Anglo-catholics, where opposition to women's ordination is highest, but in both cases the difference was largely explained by differences in education levels between the sexes. Clergywomen, with access to leadership resources, were less literal than clergymen in both Anglo-catholic and evangelical traditions. The results offer rather weak support for the compensatory schema hypothesis, and an alternative explanations of the findings are discussed.

*Keywords:* Anglican, biblical literalism, clergy, gender, social structuration

## Introduction

Biblical literalism has been an important concept in the study of religion. In the discourse of biblical studies, much as been written by critics regarding the extent to which particular biblical texts have a historical basis, or are the fictional creations of religious communities. A good example would be the deliberations of the Jesus Seminar (Funk 2001, 1998; Funk and Hoover 1993), which sought to assess the historical origins of the sayings and actions of Jesus by counting the votes of scholars. Within the discourse of social science, biblical literalism has been seen as an important marker of particular sorts of religious affiliation, particularly within the United States. As such, it has been used as an indicator of political affiliation (Jelen 1989a, 1989b; Leege 1989; Smidt 1989) and a wide range of mainly ‘right wing’ attitudes and beliefs (Bader and Froese 2005; Burn and Busso 2005; Cottone et al. 2007; Crapanzano ; Kellstedt 1989; Marty 1994; Wilcox 1989; Zigerell). Biblical literalism is associated with conservative Protestant denominations, whose members are inclined to vote Republican and have conservative attitudes toward abortion, the role of women, capital or corporal punishment, and sexuality. In the United Kingdom, religion is generally less politicized, and views on literalism have mainly been studied in relation to wider religious beliefs and affiliations, notably evangelicalism (Village 2007; Warner 2007).

Sociological studies have tended to use biblical literalism as a predictor of other beliefs or behaviors, rather than to understand it in its own right. Ethnographic studies that have shown the way in which the acceptance of biblical literalism is a shibboleth for conservative Protestants (Ammerman 1987; Bielo 2009; Boone 1989; Watt 2002). Literalism marks someone out as accepting the wider beliefs and mores of the religious community and as truly belonging to the fold. Although literalism is sometimes used synonymously with fundamentalism (for example, Peek et al. 1991), most writers recognize that literalism arises more generally in Protestant evangelicalism as a consequence of the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture (Bramadat 2000: 10-11; Marsden 1991). Literalism is also correlated with certain patterns of individual and organizational behavior that can be at odds with attitudes and practices in society at large, notably the status and role of women. The role of the Bible in shaping and promoting particular gender ideologies has been widely discussed in North America and elsewhere over the last few decades as women have expanded their roles in many Protestant denominations (Hayter 1987;

Kling 2004; Mickelsen 1986; Pierce et al. 2005; Young 2008). Some researchers have argued that the gender inequalities in the church are simply a particular manifestation of wider cultural gender ideologies or sexism, and that the Bible is relatively unimportant in shaping the views of men or women on either side of the debate (DeBerg 1990; Lehman 1980; Nason-Clark 1987; Nesbitt 1997; Sinha 2003). Others have argued that the Bible does play some role in shaping attitudes, and that gender inequality in church circles is related to specific religious or biblical beliefs (Adams 2007; Bendroth 2001; Smith and Stevens 2003).

If the Bible is important in shaping views about gender roles, we might expect an inverse relationship between biblical literalism and acceptance of women's ordination, and this generally seems to be the case (for example, see Peek et al. 1991 and references therein). This correlation is not a simple one, and there is some evidence that the relationship between biblical literalism and sexism may vary between men and women, with women's views being driven by personal convictions and men's views being linked to group membership (Bartkowski and Hempel 2009; Peek et al. 1991). Women are not necessarily less literal than men, and indeed may be more literal in some cases. Hoffman and Bartowski (2008), sought to explain the apparently greater biblical literalism of women reported in some studies by using the idea of 'compensatory schema'. This idea has its roots in the sociological theories of Anthony Giddens (1984) and William Sewell (1992) among others, who argued that societies are structured around sets of rules or recipes for behaviour (termed *schema*) and cultural objects or products that are means of achieving power or social goals (termed *resources*). It is the relationship between schema and resources that helps to explain social structures. Hoffman and Bartowski applied this idea to biblical literalism in North America, noting that it functions both as a religious schema (indicating how the Bible is to be interpreted), but also a resource to promote institutional aims and objectives. In the North American context, they argue, belief in biblical inerrancy leads to literalism which has enabled certain conservative Protestant groups to maintain a male patriarchy in the face of increasing gender equality in society at large. Drawing on the work of Brenda Brasher (1998) and others, they suggest that Bible study in such Protestant denominations is an activity that allows women an equal role for men, and that women can use the Bible to legitimize their location within these institutions. In particular, they argue that where women are denied access to resources (in this case leadership roles within the denomination),

they compensate for this by stressing more thoroughly the schema by which the organization operates (in this case biblical literalism). This ‘compensatory effect’ was used to explain the fact that some quantitative studies (e.g. Village 2005c) have shown that women generally tend to interpret the Bible more literally than men.

To test this idea, Hoffman and Bartowski used data from the General Social Surveys (GSS) of 1984-2002, and from the Religion and Politics Survey (RPS) of 2000 (Wuthnow and Evans 2002). Although the means of collecting data differed between these surveys (the GSS dataset was based on over 16000 person to person interviews in the USA, the RPS on over 5000 telephone interviews in the USA and Canada), both were thought to yield approximately representative samples of the adult population of the USA. The items used to define literalism were necessarily rather simple and based on responses to a single (slightly different) question in each survey. The analysis used logistic regression to explore the interaction of gender, denomination and frequency of attendance in predicting how respondents were categorized as literalist or non-literalists.

The results gave some support for their hypothesis:

1. Women were generally more literalist than men in conservative Protestant denominations, though this difference was apparent across other denominations including Roman Catholics.
2. Much of this overall difference in literalism was explained by differences in religious commitment between men and women. Those who attended church more frequently were more likely to be literalists, and women attended more frequently than men.
3. The greater literalism of women remained significant in both datasets after adding a series of two-way interactions between tradition and attendance or between tradition and gender, and after adding three-way interactions between tradition, attendance and gender.
4. These interactions showed that it was mainly among high frequency church attenders in conservative Protestant denominations that the difference between men and women was most pronounced, with women being more likely to be literalist than men.

The results were taken as support for the hypothesis, though there were some contra-indications. For example, Roman Catholics are not generally thought of as having a strong commitment to biblical inerrancy or literalism in the same manner as

North American Protestants, yet the gender difference seemed to be mirrored in this denomination. Among infrequent attenders, literalism was not significantly higher among women in conservative Protestant churches, though it was in mainline Protestant churches. The researchers suggested that the need to uphold a literal schema is most pressing among committed women in conservative Protestant churches because they would feel the lack of access to resources most acutely. This does not explain, however, why low attending women in mainline denominations should be more literal than men, nor why the pattern for higher female literalism was also seen in other denominations among both high and low attenders. This suggests that more studies of this nature would be useful to investigate the compensatory schema hypothesis.

The present study approaches the same issue, gender differences in biblical literalism, using two datasets collected from lay and ordained members of the Church of England. The Anglican Church in England has both Anglo-catholic and evangelical wings, alongside the majority of ‘middle of the road’ or broad-church Anglicanism (Randall 2005; Village 2010). These different groups have distinct and complex profiles of belief related to the Bible, the role of the church and the ordination of women (Village and Francis 2010). This diversity within a single denomination allows a more focused testing of the compensatory schema hypothesis than is possible using large scale surveys across many denominations. Furthermore, comparing clergy with lay people allows women who have clear access to leadership resources to be included in the sample.

#### Schema in the Church of England

The Anglican Church has historically relied on three sources of authority: Scripture, tradition and reason (Sykes et al. 1998). Anglicans who put particular stress on scriptural authority tend towards the sort of schema proposed by Hoffman and Bartowski, where the Bible is understood to be uniquely inspired and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Evangelical Anglicans have tended to avoid doctrinal statements that include notions of inerrancy or infallibility (Warner 2007), but in some traditions in the Church of England the stress on scriptural authority is associated with biblical literalism (Village 2007). Anglicans who stress tradition as a source of authority have tended to look towards the teachings of the early church and the statements of faith that emerged during the Reformation,

especially the 39 Articles included in the Book of Common Prayer (Chadwick 1998). The reliance on tradition tends to promote a schema based on adherence to orthodoxy and orthopraxy, which may include the maintenance of the historical gender roles in the Church. The stress on reason as a source of authority in the Church of England has largely developed alongside the growth of Enlightenment rationalism. It was given impetus by the work of Charles Gore (1889) and the collection of essays *Lux Mundi*, which responded to the challenge to Christian orthodoxy created by the emerging disciplines of critical biblical scholarship and natural science (McGrade 1998). Schemas based on the authority of reason tend to promote engagement with changing gender roles in society, and resist interpretations of Scripture that rely on literalism.

The balance of these sources varies between the different traditions within the Church of England, some stressing the role of the Bible more than others. These interactions have resulted in a denomination where it is possible to hold liberal views about the Bible but traditional views about gender roles in the church, as well as conservative views about the Bible but more egalitarian views about gender roles. This complexity is expressed in the different traditions or parties within the Church of England, which are central to understanding the different ways in which the schema of the denomination is expressed. The two main parties are the Anglo-catholic wing and the evangelical wing, both of which have their roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hylson-Smith 1989, 1993; Nockles 1994; Scotland 2004). Between these two wings lies what is termed variously as ‘middle of the road’, ‘traditional’ or ‘broad church’ Anglicanism (Jones 2003). Churches in this category are linked mainly by not belonging to either of the two wings, Anglo-catholic or evangelical. Broad churches in this sense represent the majority of congregations that embrace a range of practices and theological stances.

These three main traditions have different, but overlapping, perceptions of the role of Scripture in ecclesial authority. Some Anglo-catholics and broad-church Anglicans have tended to embrace liberalism, leading to a stress on reason and the need to respond positively to the currents in secular Western society associated with greater egalitarianism and equality. Conservative Anglo-catholics tend to stress the traditional values and practices of the church, and may be biblically liberal but conservative in terms of church practice. Evangelicals vary in their degree of liberalism, but all would generally ascribe a central role to Scripture in the life of the church. The beliefs and practices of the most conservative evangelical Anglicans



would be almost indistinguishable from members of conservative Protestant denominations in the UK. Broad church Anglicans, almost by definition, are likely to encompass a range of conservative to liberal views about Scripture. Biblical literalism is related to biblical conservatism, but it is not so much an all or nothing stance as an interpretive strategy that varies along a continuum. Within the Church of England, biblical literalism tends to be most evident among evangelicals and least evident among Anglo-catholics, with broad-church Anglicans falling somewhere between the two (Village 2007, 2010; Village and Francis 2009, 2010).

#### Resources in the Church of England: the ordination of women

The compensatory schema hypothesis argues that schema must be understood alongside resources. Hoffman and Bartowski (2008: 1246-1247) posited organizational patriarchy as a key feature of conservative Protestant churches in the USA that controls access to the organizational resources of 'congregational and denominational positions of authority and leadership'. This patriarchy is both the product of a biblical literal schema and the means by which women are excluded from access to power. Ordination to ministry is thus a resource that enables congregants to obtain power and influence within the Church, and access to this resource is restricted for women by the promotion of a literalist schema. Hoffman and Bartowski used denominational identity as a marker for the extent to which women had access to ordination. In the case of the Church of England, the distinction is less clear cut. Historically, clerical leadership in the Anglican Church was entirely male, but this is gradually changing following the ordination of women as deacons (in 1987), the ordination of women as priests (in 1994), the growing number of women in senior diocesan roles, and the proposal to allow the consecration of women bishops (first passed by the General Synod in 2005). However, the ordination of women has not been universally accepted within the Church of England, and arrangements were made for parishes to choose not to have women priests (Church of England 1993b) and for alternative oversight for existing clergy who refused to recognize the authority of bishops who ordained women (Church of England 1993a)

Opposition to women priests comes mainly from the extremes of the Anglo-catholic and evangelical wings of the church (Field-Bibb 1991; Gill 1994; Nason-Clark 1987; Petre 1994; Sani and Reicher 1999, 2000). The most accurate quantitative data are probably those from the *Church Times Survey* of 2001 (Francis et al. 2005;

Village and Francis 2010), which surveyed over six thousand Anglican readers of the *Church Times* newspaper, the main weekly paper of the Church of England.

Unpublished figures from that dataset show that opposition to women priests ran at 24% among Anglo-catholics, 5% among broad-church members and 11% among evangelicals. Figures for opposition to women bishops were 30%, 10% and 19% respectively. While this suggests leadership roles for women are generally welcomed, this is not uniform across the church, with opposition being highest in Anglo-catholic circles. The highest levels of support for the ordination of women are from broad churches and more moderate Anglo-catholics or evangelicals.

The reasons for opposition to the ordination of women in the Church of England have been the subject of a great deal of study, through it is not always easy to separate matters of doctrinal belief from social attitudes or ideologies. The debate about women's ordination was at its peak in the 1980s and early 1990s, and a number of studies reported on lay attitudes at the time. In a review article, Lehman (1987) noted that lay attitudes towards clergywomen were partly related to general sexism, partly to religious tradition, and partly to pragmatic considerations such as whether or not there were sufficient male ministers to cover a congregation's needs. In a study of attitudes within the Church of England around the same time (that is, before women were ordained as priests), Nason-Clark (1987) concluded that general sex-role ideology was a more important predictor of opposition to women's ordination than theological beliefs. More specifically theological arguments against the ordination of women have been raised within the Church of England. Nason-Clark (1987) mentioned that opposition from Anglo-catholics at the time mainly arose from fears of losing unity with the Roman Catholic Church and maintaining church tradition, whereas for evangelicals it was driven by biblical literalism that promoted male leadership. This distinction remains important, as evidenced by the statements of organizations still opposed to the ordination from the Anglo-catholic (ForwardinFaith) or evangelical (ChurchSociety ; Reform) wings of the Church of England.

Subsequent studies indicate how the ordination of women in the Church of England has become more widely accepted even though opposition remains in some quarters, and there is not yet full equality of opportunity for women in terms of institutional roles (Jones 2004; Wakeman 1996). The number of women priests has risen since 1994, and among the more recent cohorts of ordinands there have been roughly equal numbers of men and women (ChurchofEngland 2010). Individual

parishes can still choose not to have female incumbents, and such parishes are most likely to be either strongly Anglo-catholic or strongly evangelical. Laywomen from these sorts of churches can become ordained, but to minister as priests would mean moving to more mainstream churches where women's ordained ministry is accepted.

#### Applying compensatory schema to the Church of England

If the theory of compensatory schema is correct, how might we expect it to be manifested in the Church of England? Evangelicals are most likely to hold conservative views on the Bible and there is some opposition to women in leadership roles, suggesting that women should on average be more biblically literal than men. Among Anglo-catholic congregations, women are more frequently excluded from priestly roles but here biblical conservatism is a less important schema. If the main schema is not biblical, then we would not expect women to compensate for lack of access to resources by stressing a literal schema. In broad-churches the biblical scheme has some importance, but women priests are widely accepted, so we might expect little difference in literalism between the sexes.

The case of clergywomen is different because they have more access to leadership and power structures in the Church of England. They perhaps represent the 'controls', and we might expect similar literalism to male clergy. However, it could be argued that a literal interpretation of Scripture does in fact suggest women should not be in leadership roles<sup>1</sup>, and that women who are ordained must *de facto* be less literal interpreters of Scripture.

If the compensatory schema hypothesis as suggested by Hoffman and Bartowski is correct, the following hypotheses should apply in the Church of England:

1. Among those in the evangelical tradition, where a key schema is biblical literalism and there is some resistance to women's ordination, women should be more literal than men. This may be less so among clergy because women have access to resources, and clergywomen may reduce their commitment to the schema in order to justify their role.

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<sup>1</sup> This suggestion would be fiercely contested by some, and much scholarly activity around the time of the ordination of women in the Church of England was taken up with demonstrating that women did indeed have leadership roles in the early church. I do not wish to take issue with such scholarship, only to point out that the necessity of demonstrating a 'hidden' role for women implies that the most obvious (read literal) readings would seem to suggest otherwise. This was certainly a point made by those who opposed the ordination of women on biblical grounds.

2. Among those in the broad-church tradition, where biblical literalism is a less central schema and women priests are most welcomed, women should be similar to men in terms of biblical literalism. Clergy and laity of both sexes should be less literal than evangelicals.
3. Among those in the Anglo-catholic tradition, where biblical literalism is not a key schema but there is the greatest resistance to women's ordination, women should not be more literal than men. Similarly, we would not expect any difference in literalism between clergymen and clergywomen.

## Method

### The samples

The results reported here are based on two separate studies, one on laity carried out from 2000 to 2002 and extensively reported elsewhere (Village 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2007; Village and Francis 2005) and one on clergy from 2004 to 2007 that has been reported on briefly elsewhere (Village, 2011). The study on laity was based on 404 responses from 11 congregations that spanned the three main traditions within the Church of England. The study of clergy was based on 1067 responses to questionnaires sent to all those who were ordained over a period of three years. In both cases it was difficult to tell how far these were representative of the church as a whole, but the evidence from age and sex distributions suggested they were a reasonable cross section of the Anglican Church in England. (For details of the samples and how they relate to the wider church, see Village (2007) and Village and Francis (2011)). The lay sample probably over-sampled those who read the Bible frequently and attended church often, but this section of the laity is the one for whom the issues in this study are most pertinent.

### Instruments

The questionnaires given to each sample include the same instruments related to biblical literalism and biblical conservatism.

### The biblical literalism scale

This scale has items that refer to biblical events and respondents are asked to indicate if they think the event really happened or is a fictional story. The Likert-type, five-item response scale ranges from ‘Definitely a story’ (= 1) to ‘Definitely happened’ (= 5), and the summated scale had a high reported internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .92) in the same sample of 404 lay people used in the present study (Village 2005c). The items range from Old Testament accounts such as Adam and Eve or Jonah to New Testament miracle stories such as the virgin birth of Jesus and the feeding of the 5000. None were specifically about the issue of women’s ordination. Items were selected to reflect the range of literal belief within the Anglican Church, and most respondents scored near the mid-point of the scale.

#### The biblical conservatism scale

This is based on the bible scale developed by Village (2005a) among lay Anglicans in the Church of England. The original scale consisted of 12 items related to the authority, inerrancy, exclusivity and literal interpretation of the Bible. It had a high reported internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .92) in the sample of 404 lay Anglicans (Village 2005a). For the present study, items related to literalism were removed to avoid collinearity. The resulting scale (Table 1) consisted of 8 items and had a high internal reliability when tested simultaneously across both clergy and lay samples in this study (Cronbach’s alpha = .88). The scale was taken as a measure of how individuals viewed the importance of a biblical schema as a source of authority and guidance.

[Table 1 about here]

#### Church tradition

The scale reported in Randall (2005) was used among clergy. This seven-point, bipolar scale is labeled ‘Anglo-catholic’ at one end and ‘evangelical’ at the other. Construct validity has been tested against a wide range of attitudes, beliefs and practices in a sample of 6187 Anglicans from England (Village 2010). Those scoring 1-2 were classed as Anglo-catholic, 3-4 as broad church and 5-7 as evangelical. In the study of lay Anglicans, individuals were assigned to one of these three categories according to the church they attended, based on information from the incumbents. Participants were also asked to self-identify using the labels ‘Anglo-catholic or High

Church’, ‘middle of the road or traditional Anglican’ and ‘evangelical or charismatic evangelical’. Both methods gave very similar results, and the church-based identification was used to categorize the lay sample into groups corresponding to those in the clergy sample. For the clergy (but not the lay) sample, it was possible to compare those within the Anglo-catholic group who self-assigned as 1 rather than 2 on the scale, and those in the evangelical group who self-assigned as 7 rather than 6 on the scale. In each tradition this allowed comparison of what might be termed ‘extremes’ versus ‘moderates’.

#### Other variables

Participants were asked to indicate their highest educational qualification on a scale of 0 (= no formal qualification) to 4 (= postgraduate qualification). For clergy (who are normally required to reach at least undergraduate diploma level before ordination), the question referred to education before they began training for ordination. Ordination status was scored as 0 (= lay) and 1 (= clergy), and sex scored as 1 (= male) and 2 (= female).

#### Analysis

Biblical literalism varies with educational experience (Village 2007), and this was included as a control. Hoffman & Bartowski reported differential effects between frequent and infrequent attenders in their study in North America. In the present study, frequency of attendance would not be a sensible variable among clergy, whose duties require at least weekly attendance in most cases. Among the lay sample, there were effects of attendance<sup>2</sup>, but these made little difference to the overall findings, so this variable was not included in the analyses.

Literalism was treated as a normally distributed continuous variable, and analyzed using a linear response model with the Generalized Linear Models procedure of IBM SPSS Statistics version 19 (Norusis 2011). The main effects of ordination status, sex and church tradition were entered into an initial model. Education was then added as a control in a second model, and the final model tested the three way interaction of ordination status, sex and church tradition. Interpretation

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<sup>2</sup> Lower attendance was associated with less literalism in the overall sample of lay people, after allowing for differences in attendance between traditions. Among those who attended weekly or more, there was no difference in literalism between men and women. Among those who attended less than weekly, literalism was significantly higher among women than among men.

of parameters for such interactions are difficult, so results for the interaction are presented as estimated marginal means and profile plots.

## Results

The two samples differed in their social demography, partly reflecting the sampling methods, but mainly due to the differences between clergy and laity in the Church of England (Table 2). For example, men made up half the clergy sample, but only around a third of the laity. Differences in age distribution reflected the fact that it is unusual for people under 30 to be ordained, and the clergy sampled were recently ordained, so all would normally be under 70. Educational background is an important consideration in the selection of clergy, and ordinands are usually required to study to at least university diploma level. These two factors probably explain the more advanced average educational profile of clergy compared with lay people. This was only an average effect, and there were many lay people with graduate or postgraduate degrees. The differences in church tradition were likely to be due mainly to the sampling and not necessarily to any underlying differences between clergy and laity.

[Table 2 about here]

The importance of a conservative biblical schema is indicated by examining biblical conservatism scores in the different traditions (Table 3). As expected, this was highest among evangelicals, intermediate among broad churches and lowest among Anglo-catholics. Among Anglo-catholics and broad-churches, lay people were generally more biblically conservative than clergy. Among evangelicals there was a marked contrast among clergy, with clergymen being more biblically conservative, and clergywomen being less biblically conservative, than evangelical laity.

[Table 3 about here]

In the overall data, laywomen were significantly more literal than laymen (mean literalism score for laywomen 39.8 ( $SD = 8.0$ ) versus 37.3 ( $SD = 9.9$ ) for laymen;  $F(1, 394) = 7.6, p < .01$ ). The reverse was true for clergy, where clergywomen were significantly less literal than clergymen (mean literalism score for

clergywomen 34.3 ( $SD = 8.0$ ) versus 37.3 ( $SD = 9.1$ ) for clergymen;  $F(1, 1050) = 30.9, p < .001$ ). Literalism was, as expected, strongly correlated with biblical conservatism and with church tradition (Table 4). Literalism was negatively correlated with educational experience and lower, on average, among clergy than among laity.

[Table 4 about here]

Multiple regression showed that difference in levels of literalism between clergy and laity (indicated in Model 1, Table 5) were explained by differences in education levels (Model 2): on average, clergy were better educated than laity and this was why they were generally less literal. Adding the interaction term (Model 3) indicated that the effect of sex on literalism varied significantly between traditions and between clergy and laity within traditions.

[Table 5 about here]

The nature of this effect is illustrated by the estimated marginal means (Table 6) and profile plots (Figure 1). These figures show that:

1. Among evangelicals, laywomen were more literal than laymen (but this difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level) and clergywomen were less literal than clergymen,
2. Among the broad-church, men and women had similar literalism in both laity and clergy,
3. Among Anglo-catholics, laywomen were more literal than laymen (but this difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level) and clergywomen were less literal than clergymen.

[Table 6 about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

The trends among the clergy prompted a further analysis of the lower literalism among female clergy in Anglo-catholic and evangelical traditions. Table 7 shows the proportion of each sex that self-assigned into one of the seven points of the



church tradition scale (this scale was not used in the lay study). The results showed that there were some women in both Anglo-catholic and evangelical traditions who assigned themselves to the most extreme categories (1 or 7), but the proportion who did so was lower in each case than those in the less extreme categories. It might be that the difference in literalism between clergy men and women among Anglo-catholics and evangelicals was because women were less likely to be extreme in their tradition and therefore less literal. Plotting literalism scores against the church tradition scale showed this was not the main reason (Figure 2). In each case, women in the most extreme Anglo-catholic or evangelical category were significantly less literal than their male counterparts. The same trend was present in the less extreme categories, but the difference was less marked. Among extreme Anglo-catholics, there was evidenced of higher than expected literalism, especially among clergymen, but this was still significantly lower than that of evangelicals.

[Table 7 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

## Discussion

In the compensatory schema hypothesis proposed by Hoffman and Bartkowski, schema and resources are linked, and both represent ways of expressing belonging to a denomination. Where women are denied expression of key resources they compensate by increasing their commitment to the schema. This implies the underlying motive is one of wanting to increase a sense of legitimate belonging and power in a way that subverts but does not undermine patriarchy:

...for conservative Protestant women, investment in a literalist schema provides a discursive avenue of resistance against organizational patriarchy, one that redistributes power in conservative faith communities without wholly subverting the patriarchal status quo. (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008: 1251)

Being seen as more literal than men is a means of demonstrating legitimacy to others when one avenue of legitimacy is denied.

The most direct test of the compensatory schema hypothesis in this study relates to the results among lay people. Overall, women were more literal than men,

but this difference was largely eroded when the effects of education were controlled for, and the results in Table 6 give only limited support for hypotheses 1 and 2 outlined in the introduction. Comparing evangelical with broad-church laity indicates that where the literalism schema is more important and women face more opposition to ordination, they show higher commitment to literalism than men. However, the trend was not statistically significant in this sample. The same trend also pertained among Anglo-catholic laity, where the ordination of women is most strongly opposed. However, this is a tradition where levels of literalism are generally much lower, and a biblical schema seems less important (judged by the biblical conservatism scores in Table 3), so the greater literalism of women was not predicted by hypothesis 3. This result parallels the findings of Hoffman & Bartowski for Roman Catholics, where the prevailing schema was not thought to be biblical literalism, yet women were more literal than men.

The compensatory schema hypothesis suggests there should be similar attachment to the schema between men and women where resources are available to both genders. In this study, clergy were used as an example of those in the Church of England who have similar access to the resource of ordination. As predicted, clergy in broad churches (the tradition that most favours women's ordination) had similar levels of literalism between the sexes, but in the other two traditions, clergywomen were less literal than clergymen, especially among those in the most extreme Anglo-catholic or evangelical categories. These women had at least some access to resources of authority, so would not need a compensatory higher literalism, but the hypothesis does not readily explain why their literalism should be lower.

Taken together, these results suggest that the compensatory schema hypothesis may not be the best explanation of why laywomen tend overall to be more biblically literal than laymen. If they are, it would seem to be not just in traditions that have the strongest attachment to biblical literalism, but in those where women priests are least likely to be welcomed. It could be argued that literalism is the product of general religious conservatism, rather than a key schema used to control access to resources. This might explain the findings for clergy, because clergywomen have often been perceived as having a more generally liberal or inclusive attitude than clergymen (Lehman 1987; Wakeman 1996), and there is some empirical evidence for this from the Church of England (Robbins 2007). Women clergy in the Church of England may be a sub-set drawn from laywomen who are generally less religiously conservative

than men and who therefore both accept the ordination of women and reject extreme biblical literalism. Interpreting the Bible less literally may also be a cognitive mechanism for reducing dissonance: Steiner-Aeschliman and Mauss (1996) reported higher levels of cognitive dissonance among women in the United States who both attended church frequently (and who were therefore assumed to be closely affiliated to a largely patriarchal organization) and who were feminist (and opposed patriarchy). Not all clergywomen in the Church of England are likely to be feminist, but their ordination suggests a broadly pro-feminist view of gender roles, that can be seen as being at odds with extreme literalist views of the Bible. More work (including longitudinal studies) would be needed to determine if the lower literalism of clergywomen reflects the selection of less biblically-literal female ordinands, or is a consequence of the ordination process.

What this study has shown is that the difference in literalism levels was not absolute, but relative to the particular tradition within the Church of England to which these clergywomen belonged. Thus clergywomen who self-identified as extreme evangelicals were significantly less literal than clergymen in the same evangelical category, but still significantly more literal than other clergywomen (see Figure 2). Similarly, Anglo-catholic clergymen in the most extreme category were significantly more literal than Anglo-catholic clergywomen in the same category, but still less literal than evangelical clergy of either sex. There may be an average level of literalism within any particular tradition that is related to levels of biblical and/or general religious conservatism. Clergywomen may represent those within a particular tradition who hold a more liberal and therefore less biblically literal stance than others in the same tradition. Hoffman and Bartkowski could not tell if lower literalism in their samples was directly related to a rejection of male patriarchy, so they used church affiliation as a marker of patriarchy. Rejection of patriarchy was not tested directly in this study either, but clergywomen were clearly likely to be the group that most held this view, and they were the least literal.

The trend for greater literalism among Anglo-catholic and evangelical laywomen compared to laymen was not statistically significant in either case, and further work on larger samples would be needed to tell if the difference is widespread and persistent. If it is, then the sex difference would again seem to be relative to prevailing levels of literalism and biblical conservatism in each tradition: laywomen tend to be more literalist relative to laymen within the Anglo-catholic or evangelical

wings of the church. This may not necessarily be related to a greater ownership of a key biblical schema, but rather that literalism helps women justify beliefs that would seem to oppress their own gender. This does not of itself explain why women should be *more* literalist than men, who could equally draw on literalist interpretations to uphold views that deny women access to ordination. However, Bartkowski & Hempel (2009), in a study of conservative Protestants in the United States that built on the work of Peek, Lowe and Williamson (1991), found that women who supported gender traditionalism tended to do so for theological reasons, whereas among men gender traditionalism was mainly related to the strength of their church affiliation. This might explain the greater literalism of women in Anglo-catholic and evangelical wings of the Church of England, where theological (and specifically biblical) justification may be important to maintain opposition to women's ordination. Laymen may rely on traditional gender-role discrimination, so being more literal is less important to them.

Bartkowski and Hempel point out that their results may have arisen if women who rejected both male patriarchy and the biblical support for it selectively left the most extreme male-dominated denominations, or if patriarchal institutions allow men to 'deviate from theological and behavioural mandates' (p. 815) and still maintain implicit support for a strong gender-role difference. In the present study, some clergywomen self-identified with either the most extreme Anglo-catholic or evangelical positions, and the differences in literalism could not be wholly explained by women leaving the most patriarchal traditions. Laywomen also persist in congregations in the Church of England that vigorously oppose the ordination of women, and for them literalism may be important in justifying their continued affiliation. In this case it maybe that laywomen are the mirror image of clergywomen: for them high rather than low levels of literalism may reduce dissonance between the wider pressure of gender equality and the stance of traditions that oppose women's ordination. Laywomen may feel this dissonance more acutely because of their sex, and literalism may be the most obvious theological strategy for maintaining opposition. Thus literalism among laywomen is high (relative to men in the same tradition) where opposition to women's ordination is more prevalent because this provides theological justification for maintaining women's lay status, thus reducing dissonance between external egalitarian gender-role expectations and church traditions that foster patriarchy. In a similar fashion, literalism among clergywomen is

low (relative to men in the same tradition) where opposition to women's ordination is more prevalent because this provides theological justification for their ordained status, thus reducing dissonance between their egalitarian gender-role expectations and tradition traditions that foster patriarchy.

This study shows the value of using a summated-rating literalism scale within a single denomination that has varying attitudes towards the ordination of women. It highlights the way that literalism can vary in a predictable fashion between traditions in the same denomination, and also between different groups in the same tradition. Although results for clergy men and women were readily explicable by the need for clergywomen to hold less literal views in order to justify their ordination, those for lay men and women were less clear cut and more difficult to explain using the compensatory schema hypothesis. Future work needs to test whether there really is greater literalism among women that is not due to differences in education levels, and if so whether this is directly related to opposition to women's ordination. If it is, then there needs to be more work to understand why Anglo-catholic women should be more literal than Anglo-catholic men in a tradition where literalism does not seem to be an important religious schema. On current evidence, levels of literalism may reflect strategies to reduce cognitive dissonance where women's roles clash with prevailing gender ideologies.

Table 1  
*Modified biblical conservatism scale*

Items	IRC
I have never found the Bible to be wrong about anything	.77
Some parts of the Bible are more true than others*	.64
Christians can learn about God from other faiths*	.55
Once you start doubting bits of the Bible, you end up doubting it all	.63
You cannot pick and choose which bits of the Bible to believe	.63
The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct	.70
I use the Bible as the only reliable guide for life	.60
The Bible contains some human errors*	.64

Note. \* These items were reverse coded. IRC = Item Rest-of-scale Correlation coefficient (corrected).

Table 2

*Basic metrics for lay and ordained samples*

		Laity	Clergy	Total			
		394	1052	1446			
		%	%	%			
Sex	Male =1	37.3	50.3	46.7			
	Female =2	62.7	49.7	53.3			
Church tradition	Anglo-catholic =1	22.6	26.6	25.5			
	Broad =2	27.4	44.3	39.7			
	Evangelical =3	50.0	29.1	34.8			
Age	Teenager	1.7	0.0	0.5			
	20s	3.7	4.6	4.4			
	30s	12.7	18.1	16.6			
	40s	20.9	24.2	23.3			
	50s	19.7	34.6	30.5			
	60s	21.7	18.5	19.4			
	70s	12.7	0.0	3.5			
	80s+	6.7	0.0	1.8			
Education	No qualifications =0	6.3	0.0	1.7			
	To 16 years =1	26.1	9.6	14.1			
	To 18 years =2	10.9	6.7	7.9			
	Undergraduate =3	40.9	54.8	51.0			
	Postgraduate = 4	15.7	28.8	25.2			
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Biblical literalism		38.8	8.8	35.8	8.7	36.6	8.8
Biblical conservatism		23.8	6.4	21.1	7.2	21.8	7.1

Table 3

*Biblical conservatism in the various traditions of the Church of England*

			Mean	SD	<i>n</i>
Anglo-catholic	All		17.3	4.6	370
	Laity	Male	18.7	4.6	41
		Female	19.5	4.7	49
		All	19.1	4.6	90
	Clergy	Male	17.0	4.7	132
		Female	16.4	4.1	148
		All	16.7	4.4	280
Broad	All		19.9	5.9	574
	Laity	Male	22.1	6.7	35
		Female	22.6	5.6	73
		All	22.4	6.0	108
	Clergy	Male	19.8	6.4	211
		Female	18.9	5.0	255
		All	19.3	5.7	466
Evangelical	All		27.4	6.4	504
	Laity	Male	26.2	6.7	72
		Female	27.1	5.1	126
		All	26.8	5.7	198
	Clergy	Male	29.1	6.9	186
		Female	25.7	6.2	120
		All	27.7	6.8	306

Note. The maximum possible scale range is from 8 (least biblically conservative) to 40 (most biblically conservative).  $F(2, 1443)$  for difference in means between traditions = 376.74,  $p < .001$ .



Table 4

*Correlation matrix of variables used in the analysis*

	6.	5.	4.	3.	2.
1. Biblical literalism	.73 <sup>***</sup>	.51 <sup>***</sup>	-.16 <sup>***</sup>	-.07 <sup>*</sup>	-.15 <sup>***</sup>
2. Ordained status	-.17 <sup>***</sup>	-.14 <sup>***</sup>	.31 <sup>***</sup>	-.12 <sup>***</sup>	
3. Sex	-.09 <sup>***</sup>	-.04	-.14 <sup>***</sup>		
4. Educational level	-.14 <sup>***</sup>	-.07 <sup>*</sup>			
5. Church tradition	.56 <sup>***</sup>				
6. Biblical conservatism					

Note. <sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < .001$ .

Table 5

*Linear regression of biblical literalism*

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept		41.9	0.4 ***	40.4	0.6 ***	39.3	0.8 *
Ordination status	(Clergy)						
	Laity	1.3	0.5 **	0.5	0.5	2.3	0.9 ***
Sex	(Female)						
	Male	0.8	0.4 *	1.1	0.4 **	3.4	0.9 ***
Church tradition	(Evangelical)						
	Anglo-catholic	-11.2	0.5 ***	-11.0	0.5 ***	-10.6	0.9 ***
	Broad Church	-8.0	0.5 ***	-8.2	0.5 ***	-6.9	0.8 ***
Education	(Postgraduate)						
	None			4.6	1.6 **	3.9	1.6 *
	To 16 years			3.7	0.7 ***	3.5	0.7 ***
	To 18 years			2.9	0.8 ***	2.9	0.8 ***
	Undergraduate			1.6	0.5 **	1.5	0.5 **
Ordination * Sex * Tradition							**

Note. For nominal and ordinal variables, reference categories are shown in parentheses. Parameter estimates are not shown for interaction terms.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6

*Estimated marginal means for biblical literalism*

			Mean	SE	95% CL		
Anglo-catholic	Laity	Male	31.4	1.2	29.1	-	33.8
		Female	34.7	1.1	32.6	-	36.8
	Clergy	Male	33.6	0.7	32.1	-	35.0
		Female	31.1	0.7	29.7	-	32.4
Broad	Laity	Male	36.0	1.2	33.6	-	38.5
		Female	36.0	0.9	34.3	-	37.7
	Clergy	Male	35.4	0.6	34.2	-	36.6
		Female	34.8	0.6	33.7	-	35.9
Evangelical	Laity	Male	42.6	0.9	40.8	-	44.4
		Female	43.9	0.7	42.5	-	45.3
	Clergy	Male	45.1	0.7	43.8	-	46.4
		Female	41.6	0.8	40.2	-	43.1

Table 7 Distribution of male and female clergy among the seven self-assigned levels of the church tradition scale.

		Male	Female	Total
	<i>n</i> =	529	523	1052
	CT	%	%	%
Anglo-catholic	1	7.8	5.7	6.7
	2	17.2	22.6	19.9
Broad	3	12.7	19.5	16.1
	4	14.4	16.6	15.5
	5	12.9	12.6	12.7
Evangelical	6	17.2	14.9	16.1
	7	18.0	8.0	13.0

Note. CT = Church Tradition scale. Values 1-2 were assigned as Anglo-catholics, 3-4 as broad, and 6-7 as evangelical.

Figure 1

*Profile plots of estimated marginal means for biblical literalism for men (open circles) and women (closed circles)*

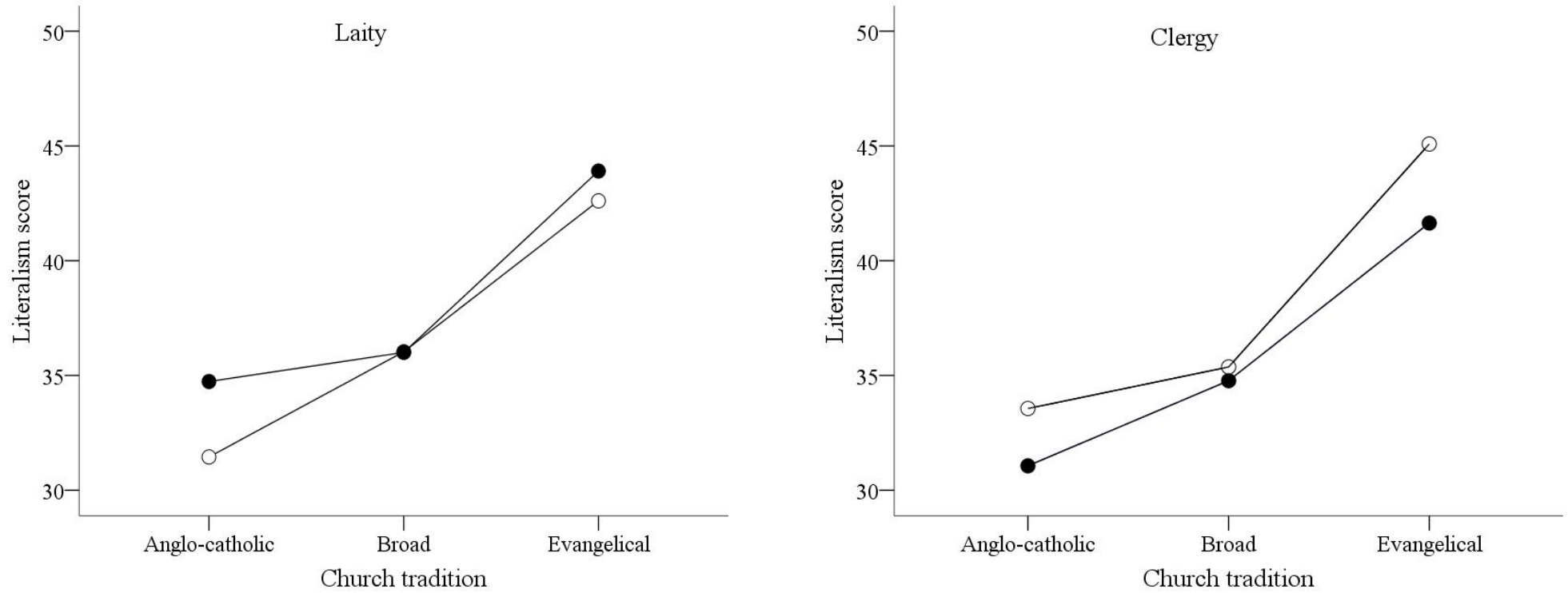
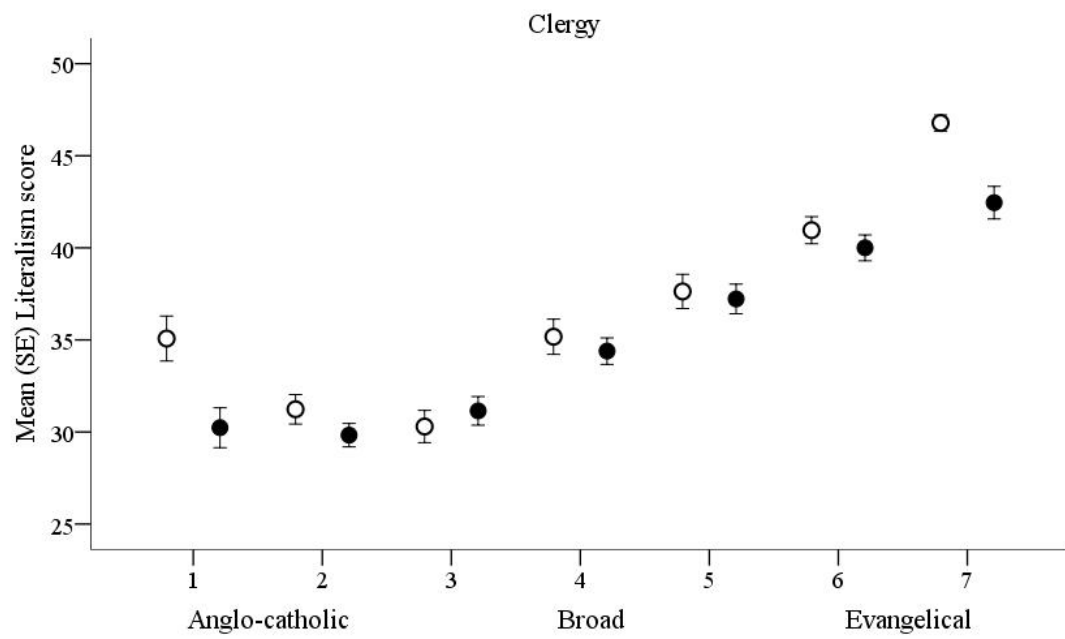


Figure 2. Mean (SE) biblical literalism scores for clergy by church tradition and sex



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