

## Armitage Lecture

October 2013

So God created human beings in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:27 *TNIV*)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should we be educating males and females, or  
educating human beings?

Apparently, the Age of postmodernism is over, evidenced by the Victoria and Albert museum's 2011/12 exhibition entitled "Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990". The focus on relativism and opposition is being replaced by one on care and values. Our new Age has no name yet, but the feel is 'authenticity'<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the Age, we are preparing our boys and girls for it. It is an Age where women are better off than ever before. But, as Sheryl Sandberg notes, "men still rule the world".<sup>2</sup> In the corporate world, most of the leaders are men. In the United States, women hold only 17% of board seats. In Europe, they hold 14%. In Australia, 9%. There are only 12 female CEOs in the ASX 500. Parliaments do marginally better. In the US, women hold 18% of Congress seats. In the UK, 19% of the ministry are women. In our new Liberal government, 17% are women (5 of them). And as we are well aware, Tony Abbott's cabinet has only one woman – Julie Bishop.<sup>3</sup>

Why is that? Is it because of the glass ceiling, with men's boots on the heads of women butting it? Is it because women just aren't trying hard enough and need to "Lean In", to use Sheryl Sandberg's phrase? Is it because women aren't as good as men, so will never achieve like them? Is equality a hopeless ideal doomed to failure? The answers to these questions have significant implications for how we teach our girls and our boys for the world they are entering.

In March this year the BBC aired a documentary entitled 'What if...women ruled the world?'<sup>4</sup> In it, leading women described what they thought the world would look like if women were in charge. Condoleezza Rice, the second female US Secretary of State, said you would have less terrorism and violence, and a world where human rights mattered more. Mary Robinson, the first female president of Ireland, felt that women would be more likely than men to help poorer people in the country, and more likely to focus on making the world safer for our children and grandchildren. Christine Lagarde, MD of the IMF, said women would focus more on education and health because they generally come as priorities for women rather than men. She also, very powerfully I think said "my hope is that there would be more peace, because we bear children and I think that the thought of taking them to war is something that is more frightening to mothers than to fathers for some strange reason". Michelle Bach-e-let, the Chilean politician, said women would be peacemakers and peace builders because, "it's...in the nature of women." She said "It will be a better world indeed. Not perfect, but a better world".

What these powerful, successful women are saying is that women are different from men – and proud to be. They bring a different perspective, because they are women. Women bear children, women worry about their children's future, women's nature is for peace. They can be leaders – these are women who lead the world – but their leadership focuses on different priorities. They certainly see themselves equal to men, but they also see their leadership as different.

Well, that's a secular view on men and women. As Christians, of course, we want to be sure that stacks up with the Christian view, and the first port of call is often Paul. His letters laid the foundation of Christianity, and so his word is of great importance. In his letter to the Galatians he tells the early Christians very warmly that "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with

Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28). It harks back to Genesis, and the assurance that God created us equally – male and female – in his image, and we are one flesh (Genesis 2:24). But now, of course, in a new and fulfilled sense – one in Christ, who restores and redeems the fallen creation.

Yet in his letter to the Ephesians, and he appears to say something quite different about women and men, particularly as wives and husbands. He has what seems a very strict word for wives, telling them to “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” (5: 22-24)

It seems a bit harsh for wives in our modern world. But Paul is just as strict on husbands, placing great demands on them. He tells them to “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy” (25-26). He goes on to say that “in this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (28).

There is a huge responsibility on both partners, with women submitting to their husbands as they do to Christ and husbands loving their wives as Christ loves us. It is a union in perfect balance - a spiritual ideal. It is something we can aspire to but never attain because we are not in perfect world, but a broken world where people – men and women – are flawed and fallible. To me, Paul’s paradigm of marriage is challenged in abusive marriages, where women are unsafe. In such situations women cannot submit, but must take control of their lives. And of course there are also marriages in which women are contemptuous and bullying to their husbands, where husband’s efforts to be sacrificial are abused. But Paul is not advising about dysfunctional marriages, he is encouraging couples to aspire to a state of perfection, just as Jesus on the mount told his disciples to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). It is a message of mutuality of commitment. Of putting the other before yourself. A sort of symbiotic equality.

Paul’s two passages seem to me to be eminently reconcilable. We are at once “all one in Christ Jesus” as well as different in the way that oneness is expressed. And that two-sided message seems also to be present in the words of Mary Robinson and Christine Lagarde and Michelle Bachelet: that women and men are equal, that women can do as much as men, but they do it differently – because they are more safety-minded, more peace-minded, more children-orientated. And when men and women “are all one in Jesus Christ”, they complete the whole.

And while Paul set the structure of the church, Jesus **is** the church. In 2009, when I had my interview with Archbishop Jensen for my role at St Catherine’s, I took the opportunity to ask him his view on the relative importance of Paul and Jesus. I said “Do you think Paul’s word is equal to the gospels?” He replied, in true archbishop style, “Yes and No”. He went on to say that Paul’s word is important as it is inspired by God, but hearing Jesus’ words have special significance. You may wonder how my memory of his reply is so clear. It is because I rushed out of the interview and wrote down what he said in the back of my diary.

Jesus' world was very different from ours; a traditional Jewish world where women were confined to the house, were to be seen in public as little as possible, could not be spoken to in public by men, had no voice in marriage, and couldn't study the scriptures. Jesus changed this, by engaging with, helping and healing women, things that were against the norms – and laws - of the day. There are many instances of his interactions with women. He spoke to a Samaritan women in public, shocking his disciples (John 4), he allowed a “sinful woman” to weep on his feet, then wipe them with her hair and kiss them (Luke 7:36-45), he turned to, and healed, an “unclean woman” who touched him (Matthew 9:18-25) and he had a close relationship with Mary and Martha, raising their brother Lazarus from the dead (Luke 10) – to name only a few of the things he did that demonstrated his respect and love for women. And women were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection in a world where their testimony was not recognised.

Those were his actions. But his words, as the archbishop said, have special significance. And his sermon on the mount, his longest recorded statement, guides us in how we should live our lives. The fifth century theologian Augustine felt the reader would find in the sermon “so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life: and this we do not rashly venture to promise, but gather it from the very words of the Lord Himself”.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus had been preaching in Galilee, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing disease and sickness. He then saw the crowds, went up on the mountainside, sat down and taught them. He taught them about adultery, divorce, prayer, revenge and so on. But the heart of what he taught is – in his words “in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 6:12). It's the Golden Rule, the basis for Christian action and interaction. And he urges the crowd to “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48).

Jesus' world is one where women are respected, listened to and valued. And his message of treating others as you wish them to treat you and aspiring to be like Godly is found in later chapters of Matthew (22:34-40), in Mark (12:28-31), in Luke (10:25-28) and John (13:34-35). It is a similar message of mutual obligation that Paul gave to husbands and wives – the Golden Rule of marriage, and the great statement of our fundamental unity in Christ that Paul speaks of in Galatians (3:28). We can't achieve that state of perfect love and unity, because of the world we live in, but we can strive for it, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, husband or wife – because, as Paul tells us, we are all one in Jesus Christ.

But ‘we are all one’ does not mean ‘we are all the same’. This is reflected in the Biblical witness we have seen, and is evidenced in our modern world. There are obvious differences between men and women. Males tend to be taller, with more muscle mass. Females reproduce. And there are many more subtle ones. A recent talk from the developmental biologist Lewis Wolpert, gave some fascinating – and as he said controversial - information about the genetic differences between men and women.<sup>6</sup> He noted that MRI research is revealing major differences in men and women's brains, with women having more ‘grey matter’ (associated with language skills) and men more ‘white matter’ (associated with mathematical skills). Women and men write differently, and there are computer programs that can analyse writing and tell if it was written by a woman or a man. Mathematically, although men and women's average test scores are the same, there is a greater range in men's scores. There are differences in the function of the amygdala, which controls emotion.

And in men, an area in the anterior hypothalamus, which determines traits we consider 'masculine', is 2 ½ times the size of women's. Genetically men are more prone to risky behaviour, more aggressive, more prone to systematising. Women are genetically more prone to empathetic behaviour (which Wolpert believes is related to looking after young children) and more likely to be religious.<sup>7</sup> Of course, these are tendencies, and there is obviously diversity in behavioural traits. Not all men are aggressive and not all women are empathetic – but the tendency is towards those characteristics. Interestingly, Wolpert noted that the anterior hypothalamus in homosexual men is considerably smaller than that in heterosexual men.

These genetic differences are reflected in men and women's roles as mothers and fathers. I don't need to sell the importance of marriage to this audience, but research is revealing that the father and mother marriage is the best arrangement for the development and life chances of a child, significantly protecting against risk factors such as dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancies. The eminent sociologist David Popenoe, a leading researcher into fathers and fatherhood says that "fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home....Involved fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring".<sup>7</sup> He, like Wolpert, notes that we are biological beings, and notes that "there is evidence pouring through the transom that men are very different from women in almost every cell of their brain, and that human beings have evolved to be certain things and not other things, that there is a kind of universal human nature"<sup>8</sup>

Men and women make very different parents. They play differently: fathers are more physical than mothers, encouraging children to push the limits; mothers are more protective. They communicate differently: fathers' talk is briefer, more directive and to the point; mothers' is more descriptive, personal and verbally encouraging. They discipline differently. Fathers stress justice, fairness and duty; mothers stress sympathy, care and help. They prepare children for the real world differently: fathers tend to focus on the reality and harshness of the real world; mothers protect against it. Neither of these approaches is right or wrong. They are different, and together they offer a balanced preparation for adult life.<sup>9</sup>

The difference between men and women really came home to me when I spent a week at the London Business School on a leadership course. As part of the course, all the participants had to complete a 240-question NEO Personality Inventory, designed to measure five personality traits. Research has shown that these five personality traits are found in every society across the world, although culturally nuanced. The NEO test measured levels of Neuroticism (emotional reactions), Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Our lecturer told us that the best teams are those that have complementary sets of personality traits. Four of the traits vary from person to person. But one trait - Agreeableness – the tendency to place a high value on getting on well with others – consistently showed strong gender differences. Men are more likely to be hard-headed, cynical, guarded in their dealings with others and competitive. Females are more likely to be trusting, considerate, compassionate, humble and cooperative – the empathetic behaviour that Wolpert said was genetically based. It was a real eye opener for me because the results showed that, in short, men and women see the world differently and act in it differently.

This has significant implications for the workplace, which tends to be male dominated. Women's agreeable natures tend to be out of place in men's competitive environment, leading them to experience 'role conflict' between expectations of them as a woman, with their disposition as a nurturer - and as a manager – more hard-headed. This leads many women to eventually drop out of the workforce. And our lecturer said it's not really about children. In Nordic countries, which have great support for mothers in the workforce, there is still a high dropout rate. But women want to work, so although they leave their workplaces, many set up their own businesses where they set the workplace culture. Women set up businesses at three times the rate of men. And that makes me think of Sarah Blakeley, an American woman who failed to get into law school, and spent the \$5,000 she saved inventing underwear that didn't show under dresses – Spanx. She is now the first female, self-made billionaire. A female idea, a female product, a female-managed billion dollar company. (She's designing for men now.) The other interesting point the lecturer made is that although men tend to score low on agreeableness, their scores have been improving over the past twenty years – so they are adjusting their behaviours – they're making an effort.

We are already in a world where women do great things. Reading the Herald last Saturday, an article stated that 'President's Pick to head Fed, banks on women as financial heavy hitters' With Janet Yellen set to become the first female chair of the Federal Reserve Bank she has, the article states "shattered one of the highest of glass ceilings". Her colleague said she was "genuinely drawn to economics by her social conscience". I'm not sure you would hear that said about a man in the same way.

With Yellen's appointment women will hold, for the first time, three positions with great influence over the global economy: Janet Yellen as FED chairwoman; Christine Lagarde as MD of the IMF and Angela Merkel as chancellor of Germany. Heather Ridout, one of the three women on the board of the RBA said "it sends a strong signal, and should be an inspiration to young women". I think it should be an inspiration to young women and young men – seeing men and women in top levels of leadership achieving great things, with different strengths, difference experiences, different expertise.

So, what does this mean for the education of our children? Well, women and men are not the same. The Bible tells us that, scientists and social scientist tell us that, and some of the most powerful women in the world are telling us that. We're made differently, have different character traits and different perspectives on the world. But, despite our differences we are created in God's image as men and women. Jesus tells us that in everything, we should do to others what we would have them do to us. Paul tells us we are all children of God through faith; all one in Christ Jesus. And for husbands and wives, although they may have different roles in a marriage, the message is of love, of mutual respect, of working for each other. We each have our God-given gifts, and if we can use the gifts we have, and respect the gifts of each other, we can work towards a world of genuine equality, not one where women feel obliged to be like men, but one where men and women have complementary voices, and a symbiotic unity. The world isn't perfect now men rule it; it won't be perfect if women rule it, but with men and women in joint dominion it will be a better world. Not perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), but better.

With schools having a significant contribution to make in raising young adults, there seems to me a compelling case for conspicuously acknowledging, celebrating and exploring these gender differences in schools. This can be done in many ways:

**Educate girls to be women:** Not in a 1950s manner of spotless homes and delicious meals, but with an understanding that women's empathetic tendencies may give them a bigger pull to nurturing, and that is fine. It will also give them a different perspective in politics, law, medicine, education or whatever field they choose to work in, which will enhance that field. Help young women develop the confidence to know they have a choice and create a climate where that choice can be valued. Teach them about the importance of marriage, of secure families, and the vital role of parenting. In the workplace, create structures where women can work and look after their children more easily.

**Educate boys to be men:** Again not in the sense of creating hardworking husbands who expect a hot meal on the table never change a nappy, but with a sense that they have great strengths as males, strengths that balance and complement those of females. Encourage them to be proud of their differences and prepare them for a world where those strengths will make a positive contribution. Teach them about the importance of marriage and the vital role they play as fathers – they are so much more than a second adult in their children's lives. This is particularly important for boys, because they do not have the same empathetic intensity of mothers. When families break up, it is usually the man who leaves – so teach boys about the importance of making the right choices in marriage, and sticking with those choices. Raising children is the most important role in our world, for women and for men.

**Value difference:** Teach our children that each individual is unique and precious in the eyes of God. Not all girls are girlish, not all boys are boyish. Not all women want children, not all people will marry. There are physiological and psychological differences between **and** within the sexes; no two people are the same. We must teach our children to be sensitive to behavioural diversity. We should teach an attitude of care and love, because as Jesus told us "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:2)

**Teach boys to value the female voice:** Show them how it adds a different perspective and richness to the world. Paul himself encourages us to value others by doing nothing "out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others". (Philippians 2:3-4). We should teach our boys the importance of humility and service, and to recognise that we can build a stronger, more compassionate, more peaceful world when men and women do so together.

**Strengthen girls' weaker traits:** Young women will move into a world that many of them may find cynical and hard headed, an environment that is at odds with their natural disposition. We should encourage them to develop the character traits that will help them succeed, such as skills of assertiveness and courage to make their voice heard. We should give them opportunities to practise taking risks, and challenge what they see as wrong. They will need those skills to help create a workplace where they can flourish. And if their choice is to spend some or all of their time in the domestic sphere, they will need those skills to voice that choice with confidence.

**Strengthen boys' weaker traits:** Boys too also benefit from focusing on traits they may not be naturally inclined to. Humility and kindness, for example, will help them develop a broader, more measured outlook on life. As Paul tells Titus “encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” (Titus 2:6-8)

**Promote equality:** Take heart from God’s reassurance that we are all made in his image, and equal in his eyes. We should teach our girls and our boys to take a full and active role in all aspects of the world, because God has given them both dominion. We should advocate a world of genuine gender equality, where women and men work together, bringing different life experiences and unique insights to the job at hand. And a world where a man can do the child rearing if it suits the family dynamic.

The world is a complex place; men and women are complex people, and the Bible is a complex text. There are no simple answers. As Peter writes of Paul’s letters, they “contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction”. (2 Peter 3:16) It is too easy to start with the agenda, then find Biblical passages to support it. But, on the other hand, the Bible has been translated for us so that we, like the Tyndale’s ploughman, can read and know God’s word first hand. That leads to debate, diversity and dispute, but also to a rich, unfolding understanding of the Bible, of what it means to be Christian men and women in a global, post-postmodern world.

And what both Jesus and Paul teach us goes back to the very beginning of creation when God made us in His own image. In the image of God he created us; male and female he created us. We are both made in His image. We both have dominion over His earth. Yet we are man and woman: different and complementary. Apart we are alone; together we are a unified whole.

So - we may well be in the new Age of Authenticity – of care and values. This week the deputy CEO of Philanthropy Australia commented that “giving is a rising trend for Australia as a whole”, with annual donations increasing significantly over the past decade.<sup>10</sup> Yet, whatever this Age, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:7) and his message is unchanging: “in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you”. Knowing that, as educators we must teach our children that boys and girls have an equal contribution to make to the world we are preparing them for. In that equality is difference and balance; in experience, perspective and skills. Their differences are their strengths. With women and men working side by side, complementing each other, taking advantage of each other’s gifts and drawing comfort from each other’s strengths, we may not have a perfect world, but we will be moving in the right direction.

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