

# 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".

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

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

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.



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

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