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More about gender

Single sex or co-ed was the main article in the December 2017 edition of *TCF News*. This month's main article, *Gender and schooling*, explores more about gender and what our society and schools are teaching young people. It includes a critical look at what some churches may be teaching suggesting a mismatch and exploring how other social institution may be having an impact. Most importantly, this article may elicit some negative and positive responses as beliefs and attitudes vary in this area. In this case *TCF News* would like to publish replies whether long or short. Some discussion of these issues would be welcome.

In other news there are points to assist special religious education teachers, a report from Ian Cochrane and news about the annual bushwalk.

John Gore

Gender and schooling

The December 2017 edition of *TCF News* contained an article *Single sex or co-ed: Does it matter?* about the claims for single sex and co-ed schools for the education of all students. One of the main claims for co-education was the socialisation of boys and girls with the belief that learning with the other sex increases acceptance and leads to greater equality with less gender stereotyping. These generalisations need to be explored, not because they are necessarily flawed, but because they cover such a wide range of issues that what is true of the whole may not be true of all of its parts. In addition, there are other social forces and institutions that contribute to these conclusions.

The changing status of women

A cartoon from many years ago showed three pictures in order - the footprint of an ape, a human footprint and the footprint of a high heel shoe. The caption was *Evolution*. It expressed the increasing power that women were exercising in the late 20th Century and the male anxiety to threatened patriarchy.

History illustrates that most societies have been patriarchal and that women have had to fight for equality. The struggle to be able to vote, for equal pay for equal work and for a whole range of equal opportunities are well documented and these struggles are not yet over,

including in Australia. Schooling, with an increasing commitment to co-education has contributed to the cause of equal status for women, but schools are just one social institution on this pathway. The broader workplace is another, where women have had to grapple with an entrenched bias favouring males and also other social organisations including those of a political and religious nature? The status of women remains a major point of social contention as equality is sought.

As Christians, we note that the church has also struggled and continues to struggle with these issues. Historically, the church has been a patriarchal community where males have dominated leadership and the teaching, backed by particular interpretations of Scripture, has confirmed and maintained this dominance. Slow to change by statute and unwillingness to implement, many churches establish their own barriers to equality. Their education programs may be, but not always, both co-educational and single sex, but their approach to women's leadership is often one of resistance. For school students, there can be a mismatch between what many experience at school and the teaching and activities of their church. But the church is not the only social organisation that may be working against the best interests of women seeking equality. What about political organisations, unions, company boards and so on? There, women also must fight for what is assumed a natural pathway for men. The law and the governing rules of these institutions may increasingly provide equal opportunity, but there remain powerful social forces and networks working against equality. Equal opportunity is sort and even legislated for, but women seek implementation.

The issue of arithmetical or geometrical equality.

Equality is commonly viewed as being identical as in talk about equal rights and equal pay for equal work. These are examples of arithmetic equality where there is a mechanical equality regardless of gender. But the Aristotle concept of arithmetic and geometric equality has something to offer a wider discussion of equality.

Geometric equality relates to organic equality and is appropriate for discussion of relationships. For example, it recognises that within a *marriage*, there are component parts, not mechanically equal, that together make up a whole. The respected theologian Helmut Thielicke takes up Aristotle's concept in *the ethics of sex* in relation to marriage. Here geometric equality is not about two individuals *but an organic union of persons in fellowship together in which regard is to be paid to the individual and also the community as a whole*. In this *organic community* of marriage, *it is possible to apportion duties, responsibilities and rights* and still maintain equality.

Thielicke develops the geometric equality argument that the roles within marriage and the family are determined by mutual agreement and may include roles for the female that have been previously thought to be reserved for the male and vice versa. He cites the mutual dependence of Genesis 3:16f, equal recipients of grace 1Peter 3:7 and Ephesians 5:21f *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. In this latter context, mutual submission is explained as wives submitting to husbands, husbands loving their wives (agape - putting them first - another way of expressing submission). In terms of the households, a reciprocal relationship with children and slaves showing obedience and the parent/master a response of care. Within the cultural overlays of submission and obedience in first century Roman society, the Biblical principle of relationships is mutual submission fostering geometrical equality. This equality establishes agreed roles where the other partner submits which allows boundaries to be set and responsibilities confirmed.

Unfortunately, some churches have seized on geometric equality as recognising male and female differences within the marriage and have prescribed roles for women and roles for men whether married or single. This approach has further entrenched inequality in these churches and has brought them into conflict with a society seeking arithmetic equality. Some key examples of the exclusion of women from particular roles are priest, senior pastor, and (based on a particular interpretation of 1Timothy 2:11f which ignores the singular tense amongst other things) preacher. Where restrictions on roles are adopted, many women feel depressed, discouraged and put down. They are not able to, or are limited in, providing leadership and ministry which inhibits church growth. It should be noted that where ever spiritual gifts are mentioned in the Bible they are gender neutral because the Holy Spirit chooses whom he will to carry out his work.

Simplistic version of women submitting to their husbands can lead to abuse towards wives being tolerated or ignored. These matters have been exposed recently in articles by Julia Baird through the ABC website and the SMH. Finally, there is another discrimination. Men are denied access to female preaching, leadership and teaching.

Thielicke extends his arguments about roles by mutual agreement to address the difficult question about what happens when partners in this community disagree - for example the best school for their child. The decision may depend on the roles that have been agreed, but if after much discussion and prayer a decision is still needed, Thielicke argues (in accordance with the *order of creation*) that one partner, the male, has to take responsibility to make that decision. The need for such decisions within geometric equality are rare and only forced by the need to move on. Here the headship argument is seen, not as a right for the male, but as a practical outcome of mutual submission. Unfortunately, some churches see this headship argument as the role of the male to make most decisions further denying both arithmetic and geometric equality with females.

The purpose of this lengthy discussion is to ask the question: What are your children learning about gender through your church? Are girls being taught an inappropriate form of submission and that men are leaders and decision makers over women? Such teaching can be both explicit and subtle and parents need to be sure that the teaching and practices of their church are truly Biblical and not contributing to gender stereotyping.

Home, friends, mentors, media and social organisations

Before considering the role that schools play in teaching about gender, it is recognised that, amongst the major influences on how children learn about gender, the school is not included. The attitudes of the home are hard to change and teachers recognise that the home is the source of expressions about gender that they hear in class. As children reach adolescence, their peers play an increasing role in how they view themselves and others. In addition, social organisations - sporting clubs, music groups, scouts etc. also play their role. Then there is the media, including social media, the internet and its access to pornography, the television they watch and the movies they view.

So students are subjected to a range of views about gender and each child learns about themselves and others from these sources. How important is it that both parents take the initiative to talk with their children about gender and not allow their children's knowledge to be purely sourced by other people and media.

Due to this range of sources, there is wide community concern about how children see themselves and others in relation to gender. In particular, the attitude of males to women has been a community concern. Robert Hogg writing in the *Guardian* August 2016 says *Men's interest in maintaining patriarchy is strong. So strong that in many cases it overrides the relatively respectful relationships they have with mothers, wives and daughters. For many men, respect is superficial. They may respect the women who are closest to them, but other women are different. They don't see the contradiction in respecting one's mother or sister, but sexually objectifying women in general. This problem has deep social and cultural roots.*

Steve Biddulph and other psychologists have spoken and written about boys and how they can be supported in growing up. Their books are particularly strong about how boys develop their attitudes to women and their audience is parents. However, their views compete against all the other factors that are nurturing children's attitudes to gender.

A key factor in the development of both boys and girls has been heroes who can act as models for behaviour development or a relationship with an authentic adult who can mentor and support an adolescent. If the media, idols and friends are the models that children have to follow, then family learnt values can be tested and gender stereotypes adopted. Adults need to take the time to mentor young people and parents need to be careful to introduce their children to people who can fulfil that role.

So what are schools teaching about gender?

Having recognised the breadth of sources from which children gain their understanding about gender, the school (excluding peers) may be only a small source for this knowledge. For Christians, there is always a potential mismatch between what schools teach and what they believe their faith demands. School curricula reflect the broad Australian community and, while they sometimes get it wrong, there is a sense of a common acceptable curriculum. When taught, it can be embellished by both the type of school and the beliefs of teachers. Schools, particularly non-government schools, also have a capacity to add to the curriculum to emphasise their particular philosophy or religion.

In NSW, issues of gender can arise in many subjects and can be the focus of discussion in those contexts. However, it is the *Personal development, health and physical education syllabuses* that carry more explicit teaching about gender. Objectives (Years 7-10) include, *enhance a sense of self and develop caring and respectful relationships*. In the broad perspectives is *Gender* which includes: *differences in life opportunities based on gender; the concept of gender stereotyping; the media's role in creating, perpetuating or breaking down stereotypes; the social construction of gender* etc. All these matters and more are what would be expected in this syllabus.

In the hands of a trained teacher, discussion of these matters should be routine, but not always without difficulty as students express a range of views often including stereotypes and prejudices that can be confronting to other students. For students from Christian families, attitudes learnt in the family and the church may be challenged and this is why both families and churches need to keep dialogue open with teenagers to reassure and support them.

When a child is born, parents want to know: Is it a boy or a girl? There can be no more disturbing answer than *we're not sure*. Yet, children are born with indeterminate genitalia and with abnormal sex chromosomes which cast their gender into question. As Christians, this should not surprise us. In *The Fall*, corruption entered the world and all sorts of abnormalities occurred. Sexuality was not excluded. For whatever reasons, today an increasing number of people have recognised that they are not sexually attracted to the opposite sex, but to persons of the same sex. These people, the LGBTI community have sought equality in many ways including recently the right to marriage. Such matters are discussed in schools and parents need to be open to discussion with their children about them.

Recently, Christians in many places expressed concern about *the Safe Schools* program which was constructed to support LGBTI students and to counter discrimination and bullying against them. The program contained a number of statements and activities that were seen to be promoting LGBTI lifestyles, including a controversial concept of gender fluidity and the program was consequently modified by the Australian government. The program has since been withdrawn from NSW schools, but continues in Victorian schools and some schools in other states. However, all states are concerned to have a program or content within the syllabuses to address any discrimination against and bullying of LGBTI students. Attention to this matter may also be needed in Christian and Islamic schools where strong negative beliefs about homosexuality could unintentionally lead to discrimination and bullying of these students.

Within the NSW curriculum, there is a huge scope to help young people address gender issues. But schools are just one social organisation having input and so if, for example, women are to gain equality, then the underlying attitudes to gender must be addressed through all social groups of which the family is foremost. For Christians, the church has a role to play, but if that role is to be positive and impactful for women, the church will need to reform from within so that its messages to young people are not that it supports discrimination and inequality, but advocates appropriate Biblical geometric equality.

Conclusion

There is conflicting evidence about the contribution of single sex and co-educational schools to issues of gender. Single sex schools for girls can provide less subject stereotyping with girls more heavily enrolled in STEM subjects. Co-educational schools can provide much more interaction between genders allowing students to better relate to each other. Most studies indicate that other factors rather than school type affect attitudes to gender.

The breadth of influences on how young people view gender makes the school just one input. Whether co-educational or single sex, schools have a role to play in countering the gender discrimination and stereotyping within our society. That one type of school does a better job than the other is open to debate and an answer probably lies in how well the individual school teaches in this area and demonstrates that teaching through its practices. As a result the input and contribution of schools should not be underestimated.

John Gore

Behaviour Management Strategies for High School SRE Teachers - by Karen Davies and Harley Mills

Make the school a priority rather than just one lesson a week. Find out what happens there.

a) **Get to know the kids in your school and be known by them.**

Learn some of their names. Build relationships with the kids not as their best friend but as one of their teachers. Pray over your class lists of students. Get your list a week ahead - in high schools they often come with photos.

Remember that the students are just kids and not the enemy - they don't usually set out to be nasty to you. There is no problem children but there are children with problems.

Speak quietly to the students so that they have to listen to hear you.

Set out your expectations with students and expect them to reach them.

b) **Know the *School Rules* and behaviour expectations of the school.**

(You can usually look them up online). This will enable you to refer to them when challenging student behaviour. For example, *I thought that X was against the school rules. Phones must be away during lessons and we are not using our phones in this lesson, so you must be wasting your battery life on non-lesson distractions.*

Follow the school procedures for the breaking the school rules. Call kids out for the small things you can usually win like chewing gum in class, to establish your authority as a teacher. Use this knowledge not for punishment but as a tool to direct kids.

Know what to respond to in regard to behaviour and what to ignore. Pick your battles and seek help for the challenges. Find out from the welfare or class teacher about disruptive and difficult students in your classes and how to handle them.

c) **Know the school *Uniform Code* -** parents have helped write this code with input from students and staff. This information gives you more background information to use to establish your authority with students.

d) **Know the school *Welfare Policy* -** The "chain of command" to refer kids to. "If I mention this to the deputy what do you think will happen?" Who is in charge of enforcing the school uniform policy, etc? Use this knowledge not for punishment but as a tool to direct kids.

e) **Belong to the P&C,** if possible as the community "citizen". This is where the decisions in a school are often made about scripture and policy. It also gets you known to the involved parents and the principal.

f) **Volunteer for canteen duty -** so that you are seen and known by students, parents and staff. It is a great way to show your service and care towards others as a servant of Christ.

- g) **Volunteer to help** on excursions, sports days, school fetes or as a reading tutor again to be known in the school and valued a bit. You will be less likely to be disregarded and scripture seen as expendable. Be a servant of the school.
- h) **Get to know the office people** - they are often your first point of contact each week. They are the ones you can ask for class lists and other help.
- i) **Get to know key people** - the SRE coordinator, school principal, deputy and other key people in your school so that you can refer to them and they know you to back you up.
- j) **Get your backup support organised.**
Stay close to your God through personal Bible Study, prayer and church.
Pray for kids and lessons in advanced.
Get your Bible Study group to pray each week for your classes.
Ask for assistance from all and sundry!
- k) **Be organised and be prepared.**
Be flexible and ready to change the lesson if the kids aren't responding to your prepared presentation. You may need to change your whole approach because you are stuck with last period Fridays.

Be flexible and understanding towards the school if things happen such as the casual teacher takes your class out for sport because they weren't told that scripture was on. Be willing to be wronged and forgiving.

Livingstone school

Eight years ago, I started the sponsorship scheme for teachers and the Chaklabazaar Hindu untouchable village students. What an amazing journey it has been for all of us.

We are going to Bangladesh for the tenth time in less than six weeks, leaving Sydney on Monday 12th February. To not lose the relationships with Bangladeshis that we have developed since 2005, it is important that we go. Jill had a left knee replacement just four months ago. Her knee has not responded as quickly as was thought, and she still has doubts about travelling and whilst there. We are asking for prayer about this. John Hain, the Geography teacher trainer, is travelling with us, just as he did last year.

The purpose of my visit is again threefold:

1. To catch up with staff at both LAMB School and Livingstone School;
2. To observe lots of lessons to see how the teachers at both schools are progressing in their teaching - LSB each morning and LAMB School each afternoon; and,
3. Most importantly, to seek further recovery in our relationships with Bimal, the Headmaster, and his wife Parul.

Bimal told me in his email, that the most senior teacher at the school, Noman, had resigned in December, because of ill health. His wife, Aklima, has been in Dakar and was the best teacher on staff by far. I am hoping that Bimal quickly negotiates Aklima's return to the school.

In 2016, there were 215 students at the school. At the start of 2017, Bimal was forced to raise school fees slightly to keep up with costs of materials, but about 70 students left the school as a result. As I gave Bimal five year's notice of the ending of Australian sponsorship, thus forcing him to be responsible for financial sustainability, he has had to start making tough financial decisions. Even tougher ones will come when all funding stops. I am yet to learn the student numbers for this year.

For pray:

1. For our preparation, as we gird ourselves to go again;
2. That Jill's knee will recover in time;
3. That we will be open to be used in any way that God wants from us. We want to be good listeners to what God wants us to do and say, whilst we are there.
4. That a better relationship with Bimal and Parul will result;
5. That we will model our loving God; and
6. That we will be extremely careful with our health and safety at all times.

Warm regards to you all,

Ian & Jill.

TCF Bushwalk - Saturday 24th February 2018

Come and join us for a great day out of fun, fellowship and walking to Karloo Pool for lunch and a swim. Approximate time of outing is 4 hours.

Meet at Waterfall Station car park at 10am.

We will finish the walk at Heathcote Station and car pool people back to Waterfall Station.

Bring your own lunch, hat, walking shoes, water, swimmers and towel.

Contact: Ken Silvester on 0403 251 437

We look forward to seeing you.

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