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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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God's will, divorce is a reality in a sinful world, and the New Testament recognizes that reality in the exceptive clause. Dr. Wenham says 'no', because he believes Jesus never wants divorced Christians to remarry (though if they do, they are still welcome to Communion).

Both of us, it seems, agree about God's ideal for marriage, and about the sinfulness of breaking the marriage covenant (and, incidentally, 'which my covenant they brake' is part of the story of God's covenant with his people). I do not seek to encourage divorce at all, as I hope my discussion of reconciliation made clear. The practical question that we answer differently is how the church is best able to give institutional expression both to the will of God for marriage, *and* to the fact that sin (even this sin) can be forgiven.

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David Atkinson is Chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, England. **p. 134**

## Sex Role Stereotyping and the Education of Girls

Margaret Malcolm

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*In this article Margaret Malcolm points to the failure in the thinking of church and society to accept women as persons in the same way as men. The author discusses the conditioning of the sex role of boys and girls by the secondary school level of education and calls Christians to examine their attitudes to women in society and to their national educational systems.*  
(Editor)

In a topic such as "the education of girls" one is dealing with underlying issues which have been deeply rooted in our cultural traditions and, indeed, in the traditions of most races on this planet almost since time began. Present day expressions such as suffragettes, women's lib., feminists, the battle of the sexes, equal pay for equal work, all bring to mind the age-old tensions between the similarities and dissimilarities of men and women. They exemplify the fact that there are sex role stereotypes of occupational activity, of superiority and inferiority, of leadership and passivity, which only very recently have been questioned.

While not agreeing with all the suffragettes and feminists represent, I firmly believe that they have had some things to complain about; and mainly through their efforts, tremendous advances in recognizing women as people have been made in recent times—and needed to be. For example, as late as the end of last century women in our society were treated legally as second class citizens, without the right to vote, without the right to hold property and dispose of it, without the right to education, without the right to go to court, without the right to exercise their abilities in careers they themselves chose. All these rights have been won for women in our society only comparatively recently. Yet still, today, some of the old stereotypes and attitudes remain and Christian women and

girls, in particular, are often presented with these as being God-given patterns for their behaviour.

That this is not so is the fundamental contention of this article. It is contended further that the nature and quality of the education offered to girls in our society depends basically upon the resolving of this issue. If girls are regarded only as future helpmates, mothers and homemakers, their education will be vastly different from that offered [p. 135](#) to them if they are regarded as persons in their own right. The ambition of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, is noteworthy: “The first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being regardless of sex.”

I believe St. Paul would stand alongside her on this issue for did he not write: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The ideal of personhood, with all individuals of equal worth as persons—with different qualities, characteristics, abilities, responsibilities, but all of equal worth in their personhood—is, I believe, a basic Scriptural principle. But it is one which has very often been ignored, not only by the world around us, but by the church itself.

## STATUS OF WOMEN

Down through the ages the theme has consistently been the inferiority of women and the consequent demand for their repression in varying ways. The ancient Jew prayed to God, “I thank Thee that I am not a woman”. Even at the height of their culture, a low view of women existed in the Greek and Roman worlds and it was only in Greek art and poetry that women were heroines. Aristotle is said to have taught that women were inferior in every way, only a rank above slaves. Xenophon, the historian, recorded these prejudices and wrote that women were best confined to an “inside world”.

The early Church Fathers followed in the same line. Tertullian spoke of women as “the mothers of all ills”, Chrysostom wrote of women as “a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination”, almost, as Gladys Hunt<sup>2</sup> suggests, as if women were designed by Satan instead of made in the image of God. Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that “woman is a misbegotten male” and St. Augustine agreed with the Graeco-Roman tradition that woman’s sole function is procreation. And what the early church fathers taught, the Christian church through the centuries, often believed was the pattern that God had ordained.

But was it? Or was it rather a cultural pattern, the outcome of sin, a pattern of the world to which the church too easily conformed? I believe it was the latter and, moreover, that this cultural pattern started right back at the Fall. Disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden disrupted not only the man to God relationship, not only the man to earth relationship, but also the man to woman relationship. The key [p. 136](#) verse in this argument is “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you”.<sup>3</sup> A recent paper by Ross Palmer on this topic carries on’

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<sup>1</sup> [Galatians 3:28](#) (N.I.V.).

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for some of the historical outline to Gladys Hunt, *Ms. Means Myself*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> [Genesis 3:16](#) (N.I.V.).

It is very true that from that day to this, violent passion, ruthless domination have characterised the relationships of the sexes in many parts of the world. Women are counted either as sex objects, there purely to satisfy the men's physical desires, or as more or less valuable chattels to work in the fields and increase a man's status in the community—possessions rather than people.

But notice very carefully that God is not putting His stamp of approval on this state of affairs. He does not even say in [Genesis 3](#) that He is causing it to happen as a punishment. Rather it is a plain statement of fact that this will take place.

And just as Adam is not expected to *let* the thorns and thistles grow in his vegetable patch because God said they would, so there is no reason why we should *accept* passion and domination between the sexes. Adam was to toil against the weeds and we too are to struggle against the distortion of human relationships wrought by sin. The Fall and [Genesis 3](#) give no ground for saying that women are Divinely ordained to be dominated by men. Rather, domination is the result of sin and to be fought against with the aim to restore the original partnership God designed us for.<sup>4</sup>

So in that garden, at the very beginning of our history, the unity of the sexes, the enhancing, the complementing the one of the other, which was God's original pattern was lost and instead domination and subjugation, superiority and inferiority became the characteristic attitudes. This was, indeed, not God's original perfect pattern. It came into the world as a result of sin and has remained in the world, as sin has remained.

My recognition of the validity of the above view is supported when I look at the attitude Jesus, the perfect man, untainted by sin, adopted towards women. It is very clear that Christ did not conform to all the rigid cultural patterns of his day as far as attitudes to members of the opposite sex were concerned. He moved about in the company of women with a freedom unknown to the teachers of his day. In an analysis of person-to-person healings or interviews in the gospels of Luke and John it is interesting to note that, apart from his time with his disciples, Jesus in Luke healed or talked with women on ten separate occasions and with men on eighteen occasions. In John, which is among other things the gospel of personal discourse or interview, there are four major sessions with men and four also with [p. 137](#) women. Even his disciples marvelled that he, a rabbi, should hold a conversation with a woman, the woman of Samaria, in public. But he did. And moreover to that very woman Jesus gave the first revelation that he was the Messiah.

The cultural patterns of that day further decreed that women could not be taught the scriptures—but Jesus did; that women could not bear witness—but Jesus deliberately commissioned a woman, Mary Magdalene, to be the first witness of the resurrection and bear his message to the disciples. In the incident of the woman sick for twelve years with the flow of blood Jesus allowed her to touch him. He spoke to her, and healed her. This was indeed a major break with tradition of his day when women in such a condition were regarded as unclean and untouchable. Unquestionably on these and on many other occasions Jesus sought to give women full dignity and freedom as persons. Their womanhood was no barrier.

Down through the centuries women have owed much of their increasing freedom from oppression and opportunities for development to Christianity; but when one reads the writings of the church fathers and ponders upon attitudes and actions of both men and women in many of our churches today, one is forced to see how the pattern re-established by Jesus of recognizing an individual's personhood, irrespective of sex, has tended to be over-ridden by the cultural patterns of the outside world.

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<sup>4</sup> An unpublished paper presented to the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship, Wellington, N.Z., 1973.

## SEX ROLE STEREOTYPES

It is perhaps in the recognition of sex role stereotypes that one sees most clearly the effect of these cultural patterns. A stereotype is a preconception. The reality of everyday life in relation to others is experienced (a) in face-to-face situations and (b) in typifications e.g. “man”, “Englishman”, “woman” and these are therefore imbued with the qualities a person typically gives to that group. So red heads have fiery tempers, old people are conservative, men are competitive, women are nurturant—these are examples of stereotypes.

Sex stereotyping is the process by which we attribute characteristics to individuals on the basis of their sex. It is a process through which we are predisposed to believe that an individual—because she is a woman, or because he is a man—will think and behave in prescribed ways and will occupy certain social positions in society. Sex role stereotyping is prescribing a social role to individuals on the basis of their sex.

Some say that sex stereotyping is an inevitable process rising out of [p. 138](#) inherent differences between males and females, arguing that differentiation of the sexes is due to in-born biological characteristics. Whether there are biological differences or not, biology alone cannot account for the differing social roles of men and women. It cannot be denied that there are differences in behaviour and attitude between boys and girls, and men and women. Social reality proclaims the differences in most daily interactions. It is questionable, however, what has brought about the sex differences. Maccoby and Jacklin in a monumental work *The Psychology of Sex Differences* investigated over 1400 studies in the United States of America. They report some male-female differences are based on impressive evidence, others are based on pure mythology and others are inadequately tested. They conclude:

We suggest that societies have the *option* of minimising, rather than maximising, sex differences through their socialization practices ... In our view institutions and social practices are not merely reflections of biological inevitability. A variety of social institutions are viable within the framework set up by biology. It is up to human beings to select those that foster the life styles they most value.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence of sex role stereotypes is reasonably well documented in New Zealand, particularly in education. Several analyses have been made of children’s books and readers showing the typical portrayal of men and women, boys and girls in them.<sup>6</sup> Men and women are shown as exhibiting differing norms of appropriate behaviour; men assume roles that require initiative, independence, objectivity, leadership and ability; women fill roles requiring following directions, passivity, nurturance and maintaining favourable relationships. It is claimed that these stereotypes are often formulated in the preschool years and are reinforced by much of the education system. In addition the research literature also indicates that men and masculine characteristics are more highly valued in society than are women and feminine characteristics. Hence both boys and girls between six and ten years express greater preference for masculine things and activities than for feminine activities; similarly between five to twelve times as many women as men recall having wished they were of the opposite sex. Is this any wonder when at

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<sup>5</sup> E. Maccoby and C. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Dunedin Collective for Women, *First Sex Second Sex—Images of Male and Female in Infant Readers*, Dunedin: Dunedin Collective of Women, 1973.

primary school level, as a p. 139 recently published piece of research<sup>7</sup> showed, the materials used to teach children the basic skills of reading reinforce the traditional role images for males and females and discriminate against girls by teaching them to identify with a role image that limits their development as individual persons? That is, indeed, detrimental to their social and psychological as well as their intellectual development. Similarly in another survey done of a secondary school and its English texts<sup>8</sup> it was shown that of 31 books studied 26 had male central characters, of the 386 pictures in the books only 51 included a female and of all the males in the books, 90 per cent were in leading rather than following roles while 71 per cent of the females were in following roles.

In schools sex role stereotypes are also perpetuated by stereotyped expectations about male and female performance in different subjects. One example will suffice. Are boys by nature better than girls at mathematics? Many girls would believe so. Yet research<sup>9</sup> seems to indicate that although boys do perform better generally in this subject at secondary school, at primary school there are no consistent differences in computation. This would seem to indicate that such differences as may appear are the product of schooling. The expectation that boys are more able in mathematics is certainly highlighted by some mathematics text books used in schools. Nearly all the illustrations show boys and men doing things. Very rarely are girls or women depicted, thus reinforcing the idea that skill in mathematics is not usually held by girls. Mr. R. W. Renwick, the New Zealand Director General of Education, has noted the risks of this.

Slightly more than half of the pupils in primary schools are girls. We must ask ourselves how far, as a result of unthinking conventional expectations about their future role as women, we are in schools subjecting them to another self-fulfilling prophecy?<sup>10</sup>

## EDUCATION OF GIRLS

In none of the above argument is it being maintained that women should not be involved in the traditional roles of mother and homemaker P. 140 if they so choose. Indeed for many this will provide them with satisfaction and fulfilment. What is being contended, however, is that for each individual there be recognition of personhood and that neither manhood nor womanhood be the determining factor. It is, therefore, with this broad general aim of breaking down sex stereotypes and recognizing personhood that I see the education of girls (and, indeed, also of boys) needing to be developed. The New Zealand Report of the Select Committee on Women's Rights presented in June 1975 put it well:

Much of the responsibility for perpetuating traditional stereotypes of men and women lies in the field of education. It follows that the education system could be used with effect to

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<sup>7</sup> Working Party document presented to Parliamentary Select Committee on Women's Rights, *run, john, run, watch, janet watch; a study of sex-role stereotyping in infant readers*, Wellington, April 1974.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Hattie, "Sex Stereotyping in Secondary Schools' Literature Books", *New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association Journal*, October 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Fennema, "Mathematics Learning and the Sexes: A Review", *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, May 1974.

<sup>10</sup> R. W. Renwick, *Women in Education*, man of the year address to Wellington Branch New Zealand Educational Institute, Department of Education, 1975 (mimeo).

break down these stereotypes and encourage a more enlightened view of the roles both sexes are capable of fulfilling.<sup>11</sup>

If this view of personhood is, as I argued earlier, the Biblical view, then I see a great need for Christians to examine the attitudes towards women which are woven into our society and perpetuated through our education system. Some of the great liberalising social movements of the 19th century—abolition of slavery and of child labour, for example, were begun and carried through by sincere, committed Christians. If Christians, both women and men, were prepared to seek the true Christ-like attitude to women and not rely on tradition and man-made cultural patterns of past and present then, in this matter also they would be seen as doing God's work of freeing from the shackles of sin. I believe it is a sad commentary upon the state of the church in these days that, more often than not, it is Christians who oppose the liberalising attitudes to women and non-Christians who promote them. The door is thus left open for the accompanying entrance of additional ideas and attitudes which spring not from the mind of the Creator but from that of the enemy of souls. The ideal of personhood, independent of manhood and womanhood, with the consequent breaking down of the automatic expectation of role related to sex is a true Christian ideal. The promotion of this could markedly change the education which is, even today, offered to girls.

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## **The Role of Theological Education in Church Planting among the Urban Poor A Case Study from Madras**

**Graham Houghton and Ezra Sargunam**

*Reprinted from TRACI Journal, April 1981, with permission*

*At the February 1981 meeting of the Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India, papers were read giving suggestions for how theological education could prepare pastors for work among the poor. Madras Bible Seminary, in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, presented the following model, which maintains the primacy of evangelism over programmes of social concern. Reports of other models will be welcomed.*

(Editor)

At Madras Bible Seminary theological education has always been closely associated with church planting. The goal of the Seminary is to produce men of sound evangelical convictions, men with a consuming zeal to proclaim to all the redemptive work of God in

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<sup>11</sup> Presented in "The Role of Women in New Zealand Society", Wellington: Government Printer, June 1975.