

## Gender Equity and the Ministry of Reconciliation

In recent days society has begun to recognise and challenge the disparity that exists between females and males in many different spheres. Politically, the vastly different policies of “quotas” and “merit-based” nominations in the two major political parties are regularly commented upon in the media. The gender pay gap is reportedly narrowing but currently (as at August 2018) it sits at a national average of 14.6%. Depending on where you live and what industry you work in the gap could be as high as 26.6%.<sup>1</sup> In the sporting world, despite the fact that the major tennis tournaments now provide equal prize money to both the male and female players, in other tournaments in the first six months of 2018, “71% of the world’s top 100 men have earned more than women of the same ranking.”<sup>2</sup>

Looking within our own organisation I have been an officer for 15 years and in the early days I received a larger allowance than my wife. Fortunately, that policy has been rescinded, but in some parts of the world this gender-based distinction still exists. Whilst we have introduced policies of appointing all Officers based upon merit in Australia, we still sit within an internationally Army with two parallel structures – the General at the head of one and the International President of Women’s Ministries as head of the other. Whilst there has been at least one appointment of a female Territorial Commander *and* her husband to the position of Territorial President of Women’s Ministries (that I am aware of) crossing over the divide, I still question why this parallel gender-based differentiation remains at all.

The internal and external examples above are just a sample of the dominant patriarchal (from the Greek *patria* meaning “father” and *archo* meaning “to rule”) culture we exist within. Despite our claims to equality within The Salvation Army, the tentacles of patriarchy stretch far and wide within our movement. We need an alternative.

Paul encourages us to look upon the world with our “Jesus Glasses” on. “From now on,” he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:16, “we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” Our new point of view, through the lens of Jesus Christ, is that of new creation – “The old has gone, the new is here!” (v. 17). With such a view of the world, and its being reconciled to God through Christ, patriarchal power structures need to be challenged and dismantled. Why? For “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 3:28, see also Colossians 3:11).

Paul is not suggesting that the distinction between male and female is ignored, forgotten, or lost when one becomes a Christian. Rather, those barriers within a fallen world that cause separation between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and male and female, are now broken down in Christ Jesus as he brings about new creation. The very things that cause a gender pay gap, for example, need to be challenged and certainly not find a home in the church. Our ministry of reconciliation involves continually identifying those barriers and working hard to break them down in the name of Jesus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government - Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Australia’s Gender Pay Gap Statistics*, (August 2018), cited from <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-pay-gap-statistic.pdf> (accessed 7 January, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Levitt, “State of pay: Tennis has huge gender gap in earning power” in *The Guardian*, (14 July, 2018), cited from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/ng-interactive/2018/jul/14/tennis-pay-gap-shouldnt-be-gender-based> (accessed 7 January, 2019).

When it comes to the distribution and use of power within The Salvation Army the default patriarchal structures that exist within our culture run contrary to this view of new creation in Christ Jesus. Nor should we, for that matter, in breaking down patriarchy simply replace it with a matriarchal alternative. Rather new creation is ruled by Christ our King and Great High Priest (see Hebrews). In reality, this is a true *hierarchy* (from the Greek *hieros*, meaning “holy/sacred,” and *archo* meaning “to rule”). This “holy rulership” leads the way Christ did.

And how did Christ rule? With the bowl and the towel.

The one who, because of his equality with God, humbled himself; becoming human just like us. But not just any human, a servant. And not just any servant, but one who was willing to die. And not just any death, but a death on a Roman cross. Not exalting himself, but only being exalted by God in response to his constantly descending humility. (Philippians 2:6-11)

This is how Christ ruled. In stark contrast to the rulers of this world this is what leadership in the new creation looks like. Where male and female seek to outdo one another through serving one another. Where at the very basic level patriarchal distinctions between men and women are broken down. This may be something as simple as reconsidering who serves morning tea after our Sunday worship and who stacks the tables and chairs. Where at the highest levels we’re prepared to break down existing patriarchal structures and create a truly “holy leadership” structure in its place. In a previous article in *Others* I suggested a radical, revisionist process of going all the way back to Catherine Booth and electing her and every other “Mrs General” in our history as Generals alongside of their husbands.<sup>3</sup> Rather than longing for our first married woman General. Let’s seek our first married couple General. The fact that three highly capable single female Generals have successfully served in this role before only emphasises this point.

Are we brave enough to lay down the bricks and mortar of patriarchal wall-building? Are we compassionate enough to lay down our weapons and take up the bowl and the towel (or the tea towel and the toilet brush)? Are we sanctified enough to abandon patriarchal structures and rule as “holy leaders” instead?”

I long for a day when the barriers that divide us are broken down and we can echo Paul in declaring that “there is neither AUS nor AUE, neither Soldier nor Officer, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Lord, may it be so and may it start with me.

*Adam Couchman*

---

<sup>3</sup> Adam Couchman, “Overdue recognition,” in *Others* (Feb 2017), 17.