The Gender Conversation

Evangelical Perspectives on Gender, Scripture, and the Christian Life

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FOREWORD BY TIMOTHY GEORGE

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Videos from the Symposium are available online
www.vimeo.com/ondemand/genderconversation

Available to download from 1 December 2015

Single video:
Buy or Rent (available for 48 hours)

Entire series of videos:
Buy or Rent (available for 1 week)
Contributors

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Megan du Toit has been interested in gender since she was born with a twin brother. Both her honours theses (English and Theology) arose from her experience of gender. As an ordained Baptist pastor, PhD candidate in theology, and mother of two sons, questions of gender occupy her mind constantly.

Timothy George is the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. He has served until recently as the chair of the Doctrine and Christian Unity Commission of the Baptist World Alliance, and is active in Evangelical–Roman Catholic Church dialogue. He is the author of more than twenty books, as well as numerous articles and book sections, and is the general editor of the Reformation Commentary on Scripture.

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Hefin Jones served as Associate Pastor of Chatswood Baptist Church from 2007–2015 and has recently accepted an appointment to the faculty of a seminary in South East Asia. He previously served as a pastor in both South Africa and Australia. His dissertation was on the place of faith and justification in apocalyptic readings of Galatians.

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John McClean teaches Systematic Theology and Ethics at Christ College, Sydney. He has written a book on the theology of Pannenberg and an introduction to doctrine, and is working on one about the doctrine of revelation. He is the convenor of the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the Presbyterian Church in NSW.

Margaret Mowczko is vice president of the Sydney chapter of Christians for Biblical Equality. She received the Paul Dovico Prize from Macquarie University for her MA thesis on Phoebe and the role of deacons in the early church. Marg is an award-winning writer and blogs at newlife.id.au.
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Anthony Petterson has been a full-time lecturer at Morling College since 2006, teaching Old Testament and Hebrew. He is married to Megan and has four teenage children. He has published *Behold Your King: The Hope for the House of David in the Book of Zechariah*, and *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, an Apollos commentary.

Andrew Sloane is Director of Postgraduate Studies at Morling College. He began at Morling as Lecturer in Old Testament and Christian Thought. He studied medicine and practised briefly as a medical doctor before studying theology. Andrew has previously ministered in Baptist churches and has been on faculty at Ridley College in Melbourne.

David Starling lectures in New Testament and Theology at Morling College. He has written several books, including *Uncorinthian Leadership* and *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship* (forthcoming). David and his wife Nicole are involved together in serving God at Macquarie Baptist Church, together with their four children.

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Patricia Weerakoon is a medical doctor, academic, sexologist, and writer. Previously she was director of an internationally renowned graduate sexual health program at the University of Sydney. She has translated her passion to bring good holistic sexual health to all people into practical sex education, sex research, and sex therapy.
Foreword

Timothy George

In 2005, I published an essay in Christianity Today titled “A Peace Plan for the Gender War: How to Love Your Egalitarian or Complementarian Neighbor as Yourself.” This article received a lot of attention, not because I had made an original contribution to this hotly contested debate within the evangelical church, but rather because I called for a reframing of the discussion. What we needed was a kind of engagement that would allow for genuine dialogue and mutual learning to take place.

My comments were directed not to the church at large or to society in general, but to evangelical believers committed to a high view of the authority of Scripture. For example, I assumed that evangelical Christians, along with Catholic and Orthodox believers, would (or should) affirm marriage as a lifelong covenantal union between one man and one woman—as Genesis teaches, Jesus believed, and Paul affirmed. I also assumed that evangelical believers would (or should) uphold the sacredness of every human life, including children still waiting to be born. Such matters, of course, cannot be taken for granted. A fuller discussion of “gender” would need to include these and many other matters not covered in my article and barely touched on in this volume.
In this wider context, the egalitarian/complementarian question might seem to some too parochial, a bit of “inside baseball” as we say in North America. The fact remains, though, that this continues to generate controversy, often with more heat than light, and still constitutes a church-dividing issue within many ecclesial communities and denominational families. There is no shortage of passionate arguments and book-length advocacy statements on both sides of this polemical divide. But what we have in this volume is quite rare: a symposium of earnest Christians, colleagues and friends, who both speak and listen carefully to one another in a spirit of conviction and humility.

In this volume, the discussion often returns to this question: What does the Bible mean by what it says? The technical term for such a quest is *hermeneutics*, and the contributors to this volume are skilled interpreters, adept at “correctly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). The arguments put forth here do not resolve the difficult exegetical questions that have surfaced in the vast literature on this debate, but they do show how such a discussion can be conducted in a charitable manner, with respect and goodwill on all sides. In a too-wordy age of raucous rhetoric and self-referential theology, such an engagement is a worthy achievement indeed.

Speaking at Regent College some years ago, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen challenged her audience to remember that issues raised in gender discussions could not be resolved by arguments, organization, and church political strategies alone. Such matters, she said, require serious, prayerful engagement. The essays in this volume have been undertaken in such a spirit. By doing so, they make a signal contribution to the spirituality of dialogue. Dialogue does not require compromise or the abandonment of convictions. But it is a call to speak the truth in love, to express our disagreements in the context of community. In this way, we forge friendships and walk humbly with our God. In this way, we magnify Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, and reigning—the Lord of all our disputes.
Introduction

David Starling and Edwina Murphy

Among the many books on gender that have been published within evangelical circles in recent years, the vast majority presuppose and perpetuate a state of affairs in which the complementarian/egalitarian schema functions not only as a distinction but also as a divide: the published books, in almost all cases, either advocate for one view against the other, or bring together proponents of the two main alternative views to debate the issue, trading arguments back and forth. Occasionally we hear calls for a better conversation between evangelical egalitarians and complementarians, but the increasingly tribal nature of contemporary evangelicalism’s institutions means that conferences and publications reflecting this sort of conversation are still few and far between. Nevertheless, the discussions and debates continue with some vigour, online and in the flesh, and books on the subject continue to engage the interest of readers.

The Gender Conversation aims to offer something that is (sadly!) rare in all this flurry of publishing, debate, and discussion: a book that arises out of a genuine, affectionate, and mutually respectful face-to-face conversation
between contributors who know one another and work together in the service of the gospel. The book had its genesis in conversations among the faculty of Morling College and reflects the ethos of an institution whose faculty and student body are composed of men and women who share an evangelical understanding of the gospel but differ on its implications for how we view issues of gender. Its chapters began as papers delivered at a day conference held at Morling in September 2015, which brought together Morling faculty members and other fellow-evangelicals within our circles of contact, to discuss issues of gender, theology, and Christian living. We encouraged the contributors to engage critically with each other’s ideas, but to interact with each other in a genuine conversation—aimed at deepening mutual understanding and respect, highlighting common ground, clarifying points of difference, and learning from one another—not merely a debate in which each party aims to score points at the expense of the other.

The day conference began with a short, historically themed paper by Edwina Murphy entitled “How To Have a Conversation,” which serves as an overture to this volume. It is followed by the eight parts which make up the main content of this book. Each part brings together a collection of short pieces on its theme by three different contributors, followed (in the case of Parts One to Seven) by brief responses that each contributor offers to the other two.

The papers in Part One focus on what is said and implied about gender within the Genesis 1–3 narratives of creation and fall, and the issues that arise in interpreting and applying them today. Two papers offer contrasting answers to the question of whether the Genesis narratives imply an ordered relationship between the first man and the first woman that precedes the fall and the judgements pronounced in Genesis 3; the third explores the intertextual relationship between the creation and fall narratives of Genesis 1–3 and the cultic and legal texts of Leviticus (which would have constituted a key component of the matrix within which ancient Israelite readers encountered the Genesis text).
Part Two, entitled, “Gender, Scripture, and Family,” discusses the ways in which our created maleness and femaleness ought to be expressed in the gendered roles of husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters within the family. The biblical texts under discussion in these chapters include the household codes of the New Testament epistles and the gospel texts that record the teachings of Jesus about marriage and singleness.

In Part Three, on “Gender, Scripture, and Church,” the focus shifts to the church, and the significance of gender difference for functions which men and women perform and the offices in which they serve. A key focus within all three chapters is the interpretive questions raised by the much-debated instructions of Paul in 1 Timothy 2.

The unifying theme of Part Four, on “Gender, History, and Hermeneutics,” is the way in which historical tradition and situation affect our reading and application of Scripture in matters relating to gender, both in defining women’s roles and in appropriating biblical imagery. It brings together papers on female martyrs and confessors in the early church, female preaching in early colonial Australia, and the relationship between (female) Zion and the (male) Servant within the interpretation history of Isaiah.

Part Five deals with the implications of cultural context for how we read and apply Scripture in matters relating to gender. The conversation within these chapters touches on both the general, theoretical issues raised in the “Christ and culture” discussion and the particular, practical issues that arise out of reading Scripture within, for example, a nineteenth-century Korean context or a post-Christendom Australian context.

Part Six, on “Gender, Power, and Politics,” takes as its theme the implications of the gospel for our contributions to the wider, public debates about the ethics and politics of gender that take place within our culture. The chapters include an exploration of the difference that “a child in the midst” makes to discussions of gender and power, a searching reflection on how the gospel of Jesus Christ brings good news to the victims of abuse.
and violence within the household, and a brief foray into the aesthetic and ontological presuppositions of an authentically Christian contribution to gender-political discourse.

In Part Seven, the contributors explore the complexities of the relationship between our created maleness and femaleness, the cultural practices and understandings of gender within which we are socialised, and the sense of gender identity that individual men and women experience. The contributors bring to the discussion a rich, inter-disciplinary combination of theological, medical, and cultural-studies perspectives; the result is a searching and nuanced discussion in quest of an adequate Christian understanding of issues including intersex experience, gender dysphoria, and contemporary genderqueer and transgender ideologies.

Finally, in Part Eight, the volume concludes with two papers from the evening plenary session of the conference, relating the discussion of gender to the wider question of the redemptive purposes of God for his creation and the way in which they have been fulfilled in Jesus, followed by a brief epilogue from the editors reflecting on the outcomes of the conversation and offering suggestions for how it might fruitfully be continued.

The conference was a rich and stimulating day for all who were able to be part of it. We are deeply grateful to all those (especially Sheree Brugel, Merry Ann Shabalala, and the whole cast of contributors) whose efforts made the day such a success, to the team at Morling Press (particularly Sheree, as commissioning editor, and Margaret Wilkins, as copy editor) who gave such expert assistance in converting the conference presentations into a book, and to James Stock and his colleagues at Wipf & Stock, who embraced the opportunity to come alongside us in extending the reach of the book’s distribution. Our hope in publishing the book is that the blessings and benefits of the conference will be extended to many more, for the good of God’s people and the furtherance of his mission in the world.