



A Shore Thing?: Is Complementarianism to Blame for Laddish Behaviour?

By David Robertson

There is a test of behaviour that Christian institutions need to have – ‘what would Jesus say? In a similar vein I was recently made aware of a lesser test for the churches here in Sydney – ‘how would this look on the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald*?’ The SMH today is no friend of biblical Christianity and seems to delight in any anti-Church story. So, it was with a feeling of dread I saw the front page on the 22nd of September. **‘Spit on homeless man’: Shore School year 12s plan crime-filled muck-up day** – rang the breathless headline. The story had everything – rich, posh kids in a Sydney Anglican school have a ‘muck up day’ list which involved activities which included drugs, violence and sex. The school itself had alerted police and are dealing with the situation. Parents of the 99% of boys who are not involved in these activities are rightly upset that their sons are being tarred with the same brush – and receiving verbal abuse on public transport (school uniform acting as the public identifier). More articles appeared showing that this kind of crude and lewd behaviour on ‘muck up’ days for year 12s was not just confined to Shore but involved other schools – including girls.

The SMH had a much more balanced editorial a week later https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-teenage-brain-is-a-work-in-progress-remember-that-when-blaming-the-shore-students-20200927-p55zmm.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1601241852 which pointed out that it was wrong to blame one common denominator. Their columnist, Peter Fitzsimmons, who can barely resist any temptation to attack Christianity, actually wrote an excellent comment on the situation – perhaps tempered by his own experience at another elite school – Knox Grammar.

He basically suggested that the boys needed a good talking to! <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/shore-boys-need-their-own-johnny-royal-20200925-p55zdh.html>

But what interested me the most was a tweet from the author, broadcaster, journalist and professing Christian, Julia Baird. In a tweet that was liked by 1500 people she wrote: *“Keep thinking about this. There are 7 Anglican priests on the SHORE Council, including the Archbishop: all would abhor this behaviour. But do they realise how hard it is to correct when they teach boys that men are the “heads” of women & women should not hold authority over them?”*

Let’s take a moment to do what Julia suggests and think about this. There is no doubt that some people (mainly men) have misused the teaching of the Bible to justify misogyny and abuse. But can we really say that Archbishop Glenn Davies and the other Anglican clergy involved in this explicitly Christian school are responsible for the behaviour and attitude of these young men (I am reluctant to call those in year 12 ‘boys’)? The impression conveyed by Julia is that Shore is a hotbed of complementarianism, indoctrinating impressionable young minds into a resultant life of misogyny and abuse. Do we really think that these young men drew up a list which includes snorting cocaine, spitting on a homeless man and engaging in sexual acts, because they were taught the biblical model of relationships between men and women? Sometimes we need to beware that we do not see everything through the particular lens of our own pet peeves!

There are several problems with Julia Baird’s misleading and damaging approach.

Firstly, it misrepresents both the school and the scriptures. Shore school is not holding classes teaching that women must submit to men and that men are their heads. It may be that amongst the physics, history and art classes they are holding marriage preparation courses looking at Ephesians 5:22, but I have my doubts! Having spoken at Shore several times and been asked many questions I must admit that the question of women's ordination has never arisen – but who knows – this may be a keen topic of discussion in the Year 12 common room.

More seriously, the Bible does not teach that all women are to submit to all men. It does teach that men and women are equal, that there are sometimes different roles within the church for men and women, and that there is a mutual submission and love between husband and wife. 'Submission' in the biblical sense means that the husband will sacrifice himself for his wife, as Christ did for the church. Anyone who accepts the biblical teaching will be the polar opposite of what was suggested on that muck up list.

But where Julia is right is when she acknowledges that education, and the culture in which that education takes place, is a key factor in behaviour. The danger to the Shore boys is not from the teaching they would get if they went to a Bible teaching church ('let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control', etc), but the teaching they absorb from the culture we all swim in. This cannot just be excused as 'laddish' behaviour – it is the inevitable outcome of a culture which rejects the biblical teaching and instead replaces it with a view of

sex as recreation, money as power, and politics as religion. The materialism, lust, greed, selfishness, fear, sexual perversity and lies of our society, are the things that need to be dealt with. Way down the list, if it appears on it at all, is the 'patriarchy' depriving women of their rights to be priests.

In an ironic turn this weekend The Australian had a supplement on boarding schools – with Shore featuring prominently. "*Whether in pastoral, academic or extra-curricular endeavours, the measure of a Shore education is how a boy lives his adult life and makes balanced and valued contributions. Our belief is in a purposeful education; take what you learn and do something good with it.*" The same paper headlined with "**Collapse in morality ' behind SAS war crimes**". They are right. It is the collapse in morality that is behind not just the SAS war crimes, but also the grotesque 'muck up' list of the Shore Year 12s. The solution to that it not to blame the patriarchy, Sydney Anglicans or whatever particular group we don't like – but rather to encourage the school to teach more biblical Christianity - not less. Ironically it is the illiberal 'progressive' world of the SMH which leads to and encourages this kind of amoral behaviour. Meanwhile those of us who hold to the biblical teaching need to 'adorn the doctrine' of Christ, so that when we are accused, we can pass the SMH front page test!

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