

Publishing Editor's column

THE INTENTION of our Creator is that children should be brought up by their parents within a stable relationship that conforms to the teaching of Genesis 2, as reaffirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ: "a man [shall] leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh . . . What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:5,6). To have children is presented in Scripture as a God-given privilege and responsibility: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward" (Ps. 127:3). All this was at one time generally accepted in society, even amongst the non-religious. To a considerable extent it still is, but not by those in authority.

This state of affairs was highlighted recently by an article in the *Daily Mail* by Melanie Phillips, following a statement by the Education Secretary, Alan Johnson, that the traditional idea of the two-parent family is an outdated stereotype. According to Melanie Phillips, this anti-family attitude has been characteristic of the Labour government ever since it came to power in 1997. Apparently, Prime Minister Tony Blair wanted to strengthen the traditional two-parent family, recognising the harm that the breakdown of the family was doing to society. He failed to get the agreement of the cabinet because he was faced by "an assortment of radical feminist man-haters, serial adulterers, cohabiting partners who thought marriage was irrelevant and gays". With such people running the country, it is no wonder that family life has continued to disintegrate.

Melanie Phillips reaffirms what we believe to be sound Scriptural teaching: "The fact is that far from being outdated . . . marriage remains the bed-rock institution which holds a society together". She points out that incentives to get married, such as tax relief for married couples, have been taken away and money poured into helping single parents. Because of the breakdown in marriage as the institution for bringing up children, the state has increasingly introduced initiatives to help parents, especially single parents, providing detailed guidelines to parenting, and encouraging various organisations to provide help.

Twice recently something I heard on the radio made me realise just how far things have gone. The first was when I switched on the car radio to find an episode of *The Archers* playing, in which

two gay men decided to have a child by a female friend. The second was a report on the issue of new guidelines for who should qualify for assisted pregnancy, which stated that unmarried women and lesbian couples would have the same rights as other women.

One thing that is missing from Melanie Phillips' attack on the current anti-family attitudes in society is any mention of Biblical teaching as the true basis for family life. Examples can be multiplied of the way society is departing from this. The same issue of the *Daily Mail* contained two pages of comments regarding an article previously published, in which a woman had confessed that she found her children boring and preferred to get others to look after them while she concentrated on her career. A number of readers agreed with her, though many did not, including an 'agony aunt' and a child psychologist, who pointed out that child-rearing is more than ensuring that a child is fed, clothed and kept safe; there is a responsibility on parents to ensure by the care and attention they give that their children know they are loved.

Another recent news story highlighted the increasing prevalence of post-wedding depression, especially amongst women. Following the months of build up, and the big day itself, life becomes flat, because a wedding has become an end in itself, not the beginning of a new and great intimacy between a man and a woman, since most couples now live together before getting married.

Regarding these last two stories, anyone with any idea of Biblical teaching will recognise how wrong these attitudes are. Parents are to show a self-sacrificing love for their children, not regarding them as an encumbrance to what they really want to do, but reflecting the love the Father has for those who are His children. Weddings should be the commencement of a man and woman living together in full intimacy, having kept themselves pure for the occasion, a reflection of "the marriage supper of the Lamb" when Christ is joined to the saints in an intimacy far greater than is possible in this present life. Sadly, we shall not see God's standards of marriage and family life restored until Christ and his bride establish God's rule over the earth. Until that day comes, the best we can hope to do is to preserve those standards within our own community.

Tony Benson